柳実冬貴
対魔導学園
AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"
35試験小隊
9.異端同盟
ファンタジア文庫

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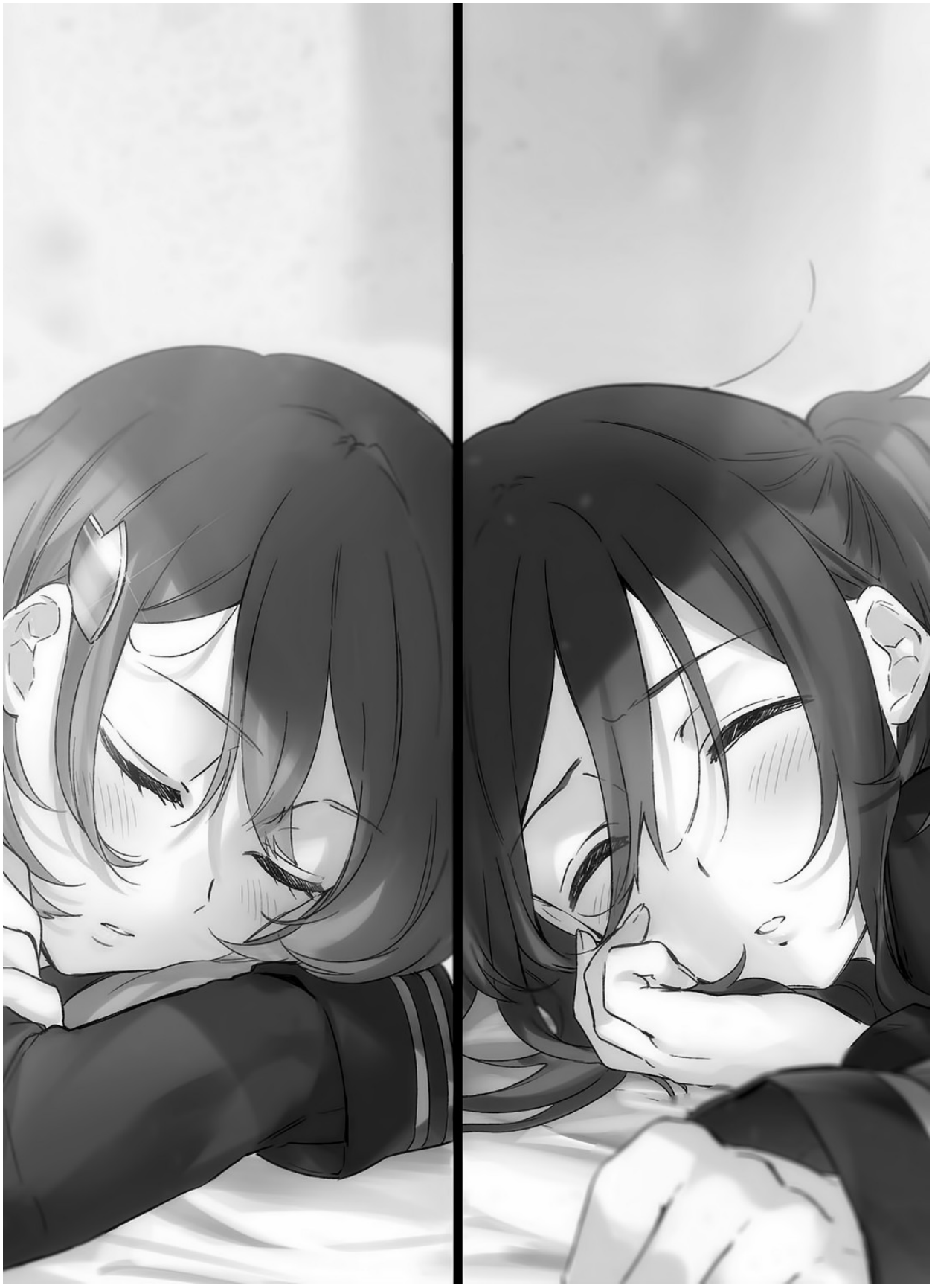
AntiMagic Academy
"The 35th Test Platoon"
9.The Outcasts Alliance

Prologue

His awakening was gentle.
The daylight peeking in from behind the cream-coloured curtains gently enticed him to wake up.
The scenery he saw with eyes he just opened was blurry. After blinking several times, his blurry vision has eventually turned clear.
Kusanagi Takeru took a deep breath, as if his breathing has stopped until now.
.....this again.
Takeru let out the air he sucked in with a sigh.
He wondered, which time was it again that he woke up in a hospital-like bed.
It felt like every time he battled, he got worn out and lost consciousness.
Even if he tried to remember what happened, all he could recall was going north in a car aiming for the dissidents' base.
...if I'm not wrong... we were attacked by the pursuers from Inquisition... and...
He explored his vague memory and the moment he tried to recall the fight with EXE members.
——A shiver, chill ran down his spine.
It wasn't that he remembered.
Rather, it was because when he tried to recall it, all he could see was pitch black darkness.
It was strange. Losing memory wasn't something unusual. Even more so considering he lost consciousness, it was understandable he wouldn't remember what happened just before that.
But, he had no idea how to describe it.
It was pitch black.
After being chased by the enemy on the highway, they destroyed a wall with a recoilless gun and fell off a cliff, he remembered that strangely clear. But, he recalled only fragments of what happened afterwards, the rest of his memories weren't lost in the darkness, but the memories were darkness itself.
What's this... how...
Takeru placed a hand on his forehead and rolled over.
In the direction he rolled over to——there was Ouka.
"...ha?"
He froze.
Right in front of him, there was Ouka's sleeping face.
Next to him, she was breathing in her sleep.
"...nn..."
The voice she let out when he moved was very erotic. Her breath was ticklish. Takeru couldn't take his eyes off her moist lips and long eyelashes.
"....."

Takeru loudly swallowed saliva and turned in the opposite direction in silence.
He wanted to calm down a little.
However,
"...uohh..."
On the opposite side, this time Mari was there.
While mumbling she tightly held onto Takeru's clothes.
"...Takeru□..."
Since her sweet voice was making his heart pound violently, Takeru awkwardly lied on his back facing towards the ceiling.
He wanted to calm down.

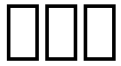


Sandwiched between two beautiful girls, just what kind of situation was this.
It was too stimulating for a convalescent.
".....I give up."
Takeru sighed and stared at the hospital-room like ceiling.
He felt like asking what happened as soon as possible but he didn't want to forcibly wake them up.
Also, he could somewhat understand why were the two sleeping beside him.
Both of their eyes were slightly reddish.
...I've made them worry haven't I.
Takeru felt sorry about that. He was always more beat up than his comrades. Possibly he didn't have enough self-control, or maybe he spent himself in reckless battles.
Looking it from his comrades' perspective, he must have been a dangerous, helpless fellow.
He too would be very worried if one of his comrades was in tatters and wouldn't wake up.
It couldn't be helped that they worried.
"...sorry, everyone..."
Takeru said an apology for making his comrades worry.
"——If you think so, you shouldn't be so reckless□ Kusanagi-kun."
He got startled and then turned towards the voice.
Hoshijiro Nagaru sat down by the window, smiling broadly with a book opened on top of her knees.
What was unusual, was that she had glasses on.
"President...!"
When he tried to get up in a hurry, Nagaru stood up from her chair while saying "Non non." and pushed down on Takeru's chest.
"Sleep□. It's only the second day since you passed out. So, sleep at ease□."
Hearing it's been only two days, Takeru was a bit relieved.
He was glad that it hasn't been a month like back when he was taken to Magic Academy.
Nagaru closed the book and placed it on a small table.
She also took off her glasses and placed them on top of the book. Casually, he looked at the book.
□Götterdämmerung, Discussion on Mythical World.□
"Fufufu, despite how I look, I'm quite an avid reader□. This book is quite interesting. There's lots of consideration about this and that inside. It's prohibited literature but my comrades somehow managed to get it□."
"Rather than that, President, are your legs okay?!"
Takeru was worried about Nagaru. In the battle in the snowy mountains, she should have seriously injured her legs. At first Nagaru was surprised seeing him worried about her, soon enough she squinted and laughed, blushing slightly.

"Thanks to recovery magic my left leg is okay□. Unfortunately, right leg didn't stick in. But thanks to the prosthesis made by using Dragoon's artificial muscle , look, here□."
Nagaru raised her skirt showing her right leg. Since in the recent years prosthetic technology has evolved as a by-product of Dragoon development, it looked exactly same as a normal leg.
Still, Takeru couldn't help but feel bad about it.
"I was surprised to see it works better than my own leg□, I mean, I can kick down an iron door."
"...I'm sorry."
"It's not something you should apologize for□, that was my plan after all, self-responsibility. Rather, it's thanks to you protecting me I've suffered only this much, you know? I'm grateful to you."
She was so calm despite losing her leg. He really felt like bowing to Nagaru's strength.
Takeru was relieved seeing Nagaru act like usual.
"I see... since I received treatment, it must mean that we've reached the dissidents' home, right."
Nagaru gently smiled when Takeru asked lowering his voice as much as possible.
"Yup, everyone really did their best. Thanks to you all we arrived at our base. Let me say my thanks."
Thank you. Nagaru thanked him with a carefree expression.
It wasn't clear what happened, but for the time being it seemed like a crisis had emerged.
"It's all right. This place is safe. Whether it's Inquisition or Fantasy CultValhalla, they definitely won't enter this place."
"...definitely won't enter...?"
Since she said so, this place must have had either exceptionally robust defence or had to be inviolable.
Even Takeru who wasn't too smart wondered where was the dissidents' home base.
Since they were told they aim for the northernmost part of the old Japan, it must have been the old Hokkaido. Same as in the Magic Academy he's been brought to before, there had to be a sanctuary in here.
Although it was said to be annihilated by the Dark Elves, there were some islands remaining inside of sanctuary. It would be strange if witches had built a shelter in there.
Nagaru stood up from the chair and put a hand on the curtain.
The curtains were opened with strong momentum revealing the other side.
Takeru squinted as daylight entered through the window, then he saw that scenery.
"This is dissidents'... our □Heretic Alliance□'s base."
It was a place he was too familiar with.

Thinking of which, he saw a similar hospital-like room and building somewhere before. It was no exaggeration to call it familiar.
"This is.. .AntiMagic Academy...?!"
Inquisition's headquarters and Inquisitor training institution——AntiMagic Academy itself.

Chapter 1 - Fragment of a Mythological World



In the basement 500 metres below the First Alchemist Institute, was placed a research plant for Hyakki Yakou.
This place wasn't as robust as Inquisition's underground facility nor its security was strict. For a highest priority facility that confined special fantastical organisms, it was too vulnerable.
It's been known for a few months already just how hazardous Hyakki Yakou was.
Mankind should have learned from that abominable incident that swallowed an entire section of a city. The Fantastical Organism that was of highest priority when it comes to extermination, 'Hyakki Yakou' was too mighty and aberrant for humans to tame it with a collar.
"....."
A girl was sleeping behind a thin glass of a water tank.
She had tubes passing through her body and her head up to the eyes was covered by some kind of apparatus.
It made one want to avert eyes from this painful sight. Something like this being done to a young girl was too ghastly.
The girl's mouth arced peacefully.
Even unable to see her eyes, one could tell she had grasped happiness in her hands.
As the girl continued to smile happily, unknown that her happiness isn't real,
"...I don't like this."
Kirigaya Kyouya frowned.
Surrendering to illusion called 'dream, he thought Kusanagi Kiseki was pitiful for being used by adults. Despite being aware he wasn't qualified to sympathize with her, he couldn't help but to think so.
He knew she isn't an existence he is able to kill. And it wasn't like he tried to kill her out of sympathy.
But no matter his motivation, he asserted that the only salvation for Kusanagi Kiseki was dying.
The only one who could grant her this salvation was her brother, Kusanagi Takeru.
"It's all because of you that she's suffering... Kusanagi."
Kyouya despised him.
He despised the man who didn't kill 'Hyakki Yakou' and didn't save his little sister, Kiseki.

"——Apologies for my rudeness, but I think that's not for you to decide, is it?"
Hearing a voice adjusted to sound graceful, Kyouya slowly turned around. Before he realized, a grey-haired woman stood behind him.
Suginami Suzaku. She was the Alchemist corporation's current CEO, normally she would be an alchemist who's ought to be penalized. As if exaggerating the fact her existence is located in the grey zone, her hair was perfectly grey-coloured. However, the colour of the lab coat she was wearing was black.
"Kirigaya Kyouya-sama, is it not? I am very grateful for your joining our facilities defences at a time like this. Thank you for making this long journey."
Either she just used polite speech or maybe she spoke like that to tease him. Suzaku stood there, maintaining a distance from him.
They met for the first time, but she was just like he imagined her. The atmosphere surrounding her was close to that of Ootori Sougetsu. Even though she was in front of him, it felt like she's not there. Just like a female ghost.
"I didn't really come to this facility to protect it... don't misunderstand that."
Just as Suzaku said, Kyouya didn't participate in the second Witch Hunt War, and as a member of EXE he had come to defend the Alchemist's first Institute.
He wasn't ordered to, he volunteered.
His reason wasn't killing Kiseki nor seriously defending it.
In this location Yoshimizu Akira was receiving life-prolonging treatment.
"I'm aware, verily aware. Your merciful attachment to your schoolmate... really, I admire it from the bottom of my heart. For the sake of saving your schoolmate, I shall treat her with my utmost efforts.'
"...don't talk as if you know anything, heretic."
Despite her provocations, Kyouya didn't attack her. That choice would end up with his childhood friend, Yoshimizu Akira dying. He was well aware it would be worst outcome for him.
Suzaku made a classy, wry smile and tilted her head.
"The Alchemist owes you a great deal, please be at ease."
Kyouya clenched his teeth. What Alchemist owed him for, was making Hyakki Yakou go berserk which allowed them to learn its power.
"But... there's something else I would like to talk about. It's troubling to have you enter the facility without permission. This area is off-limits to people other than Suginamis."
"...security here's shit. In this state invading in is easy."
"Do not worry. Even without any security, this equipment and the barrier encasing her absolutely won't be torn down. Rather, if you touch any of it you'll go crazy and die, you know?"
Saying a joke in a light tone, Suzaku broadly smiled.

That definitely wasn't a joke. The rumored alchemist Suzaku was said to produce materials out of this world.
Suzaku's footsteps resounded, standing next to Kyouya she stared at Kiseki inside of the water tank.
"Your opinion from earlier isn't wrong at all. Hyakki Yakou... Kusanagi Kiseki-sama's suffering is beyond our comprehension. Death is salvation to her... that train of thought is correct."
"....."
"However, does it look to you as if she was suffering at the moment?"
Kyouya once again looked up at Kiseki.
The smile she had on her face was peaceful and far from suffering. Suzaku closed her eyes and put a fingertip on the tank enclosing Kiseki.
cshrr, an eerie magical power has sprouted out.
"This device is linked to her body. Therefore, ordinary humans and witches go mad upon touching it and die."
"...ha, since you put it into practice, it seems like yer a heretic yourself."
It's all too late though, Kyouya spat out.
Suzaku closed her eyes and made a light smile.
"I can understand. She's currently feeling happiness she never knew. Even if it's an illusion, I'm fine with it as long as she's happy. Being wronged just because she's alive, suffering, a mismatched body and soul causing her to go mad from incomprehensible fear... she wants to live in eternal peace together with her beloved person."
She slowly opened her eyes and looked towards Kyouya.
Her open eyes were moist with tears.
"Rather than salvation by death, don't you think keeping her asleep in our company's cradle isn't giving her greater happiness?"
Suzaku asked with intoxicated eyes beyond what he could make and in tears.
Truly——disgusting.
Kyouya thought so, clicked his tongue and started to walk towards the exist after turning on his heel.
"That ain't convincing at all when you bastards are using her... dreams are just dreams. I wouldn't cling onto stuff like that...!"
Suzaku stuck out her tongue towards Kyouya's back with a "tehe" and threw away eye drops she was hiding behind her back.
And then, with an ecstatic expression she held her hands together looking up at Kiseki.
"——Aww, c'mon, there's no need for such sophistryy. This is a win-win relationship! Kiseki-sama acquired peace and we can get superb results from our researchh. No one's hurt so it's all okay! We can act by calling it voluntary right?! This is voluntary and not mercy! The ones who reached out with helping hand can feel the joy of 'doing a good thing' and a sense of satisfaction, saving people out of charity! It doesn't trouble anyone! That's

the ideal equivalent exchange alchemists have reachedd! Aaaaa, wonderfullll!"
With droll hanging from her mouth Suzaku twisted her body.
And then, humming she started to mess around with the apparatus controlling Kiseki.
She already ignored Kyouya's existence completely.
Holding down his irritation, he headed for the exit.
"...damn it all...!"
He felt pathetic having to help people like these.
From the bottom of his heart Kyouya felt like killing himself for being unable to break out from the present state.

□□□

Takeru left the hospital room and walked down the school's hallway.
He was told by Nagaru to take it easy for today, other members too have told him to recuperate with an amazingly threatening attitude, but he wanted to understand the current situation as soon as possible.
It seemed like they arrived here soon after Takeru lost consciousness.
The 35th platoon has captured Magnolia, the EXE's vice captain and carrying Takeru aimed for the destination.
Their destination was a small cave. They despaired for a moment thinking the cave was their refuge, but it seemed like the cave was a landmark in which Nagaru hid a transfer instant charm.
Seemingly it was hidden there earlier by Heretic Alliance, apparently there were a number of those hidden in completely desolate and obscure places.
The reason they went all this way north was because the charms in other regions were used by active members of the Heretic Alliance.
"Are you all right Usagi?"
While walking down the familiar hallway Takeru showed concern for Usagi's poor condition. She laughed weakly with a pale face.
"I-I'm all right, this much is nothing... I just have a slight headache."
Her complexion aside, her behaviour was also pretty suspicious.
Ikaruga and Mari didn't look too well either. They had hard time breathing and even a little bit of walk caused them to breathe roughly.
He could only guess, but the amount of oxygen in here was different from ordinary. The discomfort he felt immediately after waking him made him feel like he was on a very high mountain.
...is this AntiMagic Academy on top of a mountain?
After taking a look around he understood that it was a little bit different from the academy he's been going to. Although the buildings themselves were similar, there were few facilities in here. In fact, the Magical Heritage sealing facilities and contraindicated area from the Inquisition's headquarters didn't exist here.

It was just some of the school's buildings.
"Previous top made it resemble AntiMagic Academy apparently□. It's been done well right□."
"...made to resemble you say, was the founder a part of Inquisition?"
Ouka asked, as Nagaru guided them through the facility.
"That's how it looks like. The organisation exists for nearly 40 years, but it started its activities in the earnest around 20 years ago. It was then that the leader has discovered this place and built these."
Ouka squinted.
Staring at her from the side, Nagaru said it out flat.
"Your father, Mineshiro Kazuma-san was this place's previous leader."
Everyone other than Ouka gasped in surprise.
Possibly guessing it to a degree, she didn't show any agitation.
"...is that the reason you have invited me to the student council, President?"
"Nyaw, that's not it. I never met Mineshiro-san, even if you are his daughter I wouldn't have invited you if I couldn't trust you. I simply wondered if you are the real thing, someone who was doubting Inquisition□. That was enough a reason to make you a comrade."
Being told that by Nagaru, Ouka downcast her eyes slightly.
Takeru didn't know how she felt. Only Ouka herself could understand does it feel when her gentle father's image collapses.
"...please, if possible don't hate Mineshiro-san for keeping it secret from his family□."
Nagaru faced forward and said so, placing a hand on her head.
"Certainly, Ouka-chan's family was killed because Mineshiro-san was a dissident. I think you know it, but after he was forced to leave Inquisition he took you in and resigned from the position of the dissidents' leader, staying together with his family. Because he felt sinking in any deeper would endanger his family, he cut his ties with Heretic Alliance."
"....."
"Results-wise, it was too late... but the image of Mineshiro-san as a 'gentle father' you have isn't a lie. In the end, he choose to be a father protecting his family rather than be Heretic Alliance's leader. It might sound selfish, but I would like you not to blame Mineshiro-san for the fact you family was killed."
Surely, all of that was just a guess.
But Takeru too, thought that Mineshiro Kazuma was just like Nagaru described him.
"Even if we're not tied by blood, I can understand father's feelings. Right now, not as an Inquisitor and not for revenge, I came here for the sake of my comrades. I do not feel any gratitude nor have any grudge against him. I respect him."
When Ouka said so clearly with a hand on her chest, Nagaru smiled happily.
"——That's that, but could you cut it out and finally tell us where is this?"

As the atmosphere started to calm down, Ouka asked that sharply. It seemed like she tried to dodge the conversation about her father, but Takeru too wanted to know that the most.
"You said this place's absolutely safe, but what's the basis for that? What is here on this ground?"
While making gasping Usagi breathe in from an oxygen canister, Takeru asked Nagaru.
Nagaru told Takeru "I'll show you that now." and took them up the stairs to the rooftop.
After opening heavy iron door, they squinted being exposed to the light. Chasing after Nagaru who entered the roof with a gait everyone moved under the sun.
"Don't you think there's something strange here?"
Nagaru turned towards them with a twirl and spread her arms.
Strange? Takeru looked around. But despite being told something is strange, it was just a rooftop in broad daylight. The only things there, was a water storage tank and perfectly clear blue sky.
While everyone standing in a line was puzzled, Ikaruga alone narrowed her eyes sharply as she looked up at the sky.
"...there's no sun."
For a moment, everyone thought they misheard her.
However, it was just as Ikaruga said, in the cloudless azure sky there was no sun. Confusion spread all at once.
"N-no way...! Impossible...?!"
"I-isn't this an underground facility? Like Magic Academy, underground facilities with a barrier..."
"Then what is this light? No matter how one looks like it, it's daylight..."
"....."
While everyone was upset, Takeru stared at the empty sky.
It was cracked. Like those on a shell of an egg, there were cracks in the sky. In the gaps visible between those cracks there was nothing but pitch black darkness.
Takeru cautiously walked to the edge of the roof. Something inside of him started to throb. The truth from earlier gave him a hunch it all extended far beyond his imagination. His hand grasped the fence's wire net and over-viewing from the rooftop he witnessed the state of the world for the first time.
He was speechless.
"...what the hell... is this..."
Feeling his legs cramp up, he involuntarily leaked out a voice.
The scenery in front of his eyes couldn't be real. In the world there were cracks... the space itself had cracks all over it.
Looking up from the safe rooftop there was only sky. Around the school there was only rubble. Wreckage of old-fashioned buildings like temples, lying around.

On the other side, there was nothing. The world itself was covered in cracks and dyed black.
It was a world with a radius of 5 kilometres at most. Beyond that, everything was broken.
He was dazzled completely by this impossible sight.
As Takeru and the others were stunned, Nagaru leaned her back on the fence and spoke.
"——Do you know the theory which says we live in the wrong world?"
While looking at the cracks in the world, Nagaru said so absent-mindedly.
"It's a theory philosophers from old times and the inventor of the theory of relativity have come up with, those people said "Magical power and magic as well as magical organisms didn't really exist". Of course, that hypothesis was being laughed at for a few hundred years, but recently it's been reviewed and adapted."
"....."
"Don't you think the history of the world we live in is unnatural? Magic that always bites into history somewhere... magic we treat as something natural... but don't you think it feels like something that's been forcibly added up?"
What Nagaru was saying didn't go through to Takeru's head at all. Everyone else was the same, they stared at the world, stunned.
Only Ouka and Ikaruga retained their composure.
"I know that hypothesis. Magic didn't initially exist and with certain historical events as a boundary, imperceptibly magic has become a natural presence... is what you mean?"
"Yup. Those certain occurrences are crucial when it comes to explaining about this world."
So Ikaruga was that familiar with it, she shrugged and raised both of her hands.
That's when,
"...a mythological world has collided with ours."
Ouka said with a heavy tone of voice.
"The world we are in now has appeared as a result of the collision of our world with the mythological world. I have read in a book that originally it had a different form."
Nagaru smiled broadly and nodded.
"People who hypothesized it advocated that magical power and magic didn't exist in this world but they didn't deny the existence of mythological world. Basically, a mythological world is a parallel world. That world has been overflowing with magic that's in our world now and magical organisms as well as organisms we call 'gods' has existed in it."
There was knowledge of the mythological world they have learned in school. The spirits summoned by necromancy and hero summoning too, were called from a world called 'afterlife', it was something similar to that.

There were records of ancient witches contacting with mythological worlds and summoning angels and demons. Even now there was a few of them, but some of the witches skilled in magic were able to sense the presence of mythological worlds. There were few that doubted mythological world's existence.
"If it's about mythological worlds, I can prove it myself. After all, I can summon fairies. Still, is it really possible to have worlds collide with one another?"
Mari said puzzled and put a hand on her hip.
She seemed slightly irritated by Nagaru's roundabout explanation and was nervously tapping on the ground with her heel.
"I wonder, I don't know that. But you know that the parallel world called 'Norse mythology's world' no longer exists, right?"
Mari was puzzled hearing that question, but Takeru recalled something then.
When he was taken to Magic Academy, he heard about it from Lapis.
"When the Nordic summoners first came into contact with a parallel world named 'Norse mythology's world'. Fantasy Cult'sValhalla's Dáinsleif, Tyrving that Mephisto passed to Tenmyouji Reima... a number of lost-type Magical Heritages that still remain are said to be made thanks to the contact with the world of Norse mythology. In other words, that world's existence has been known for a long time. But strangely... no one knows when did the world of Norse mythology disappear."
"...it can't be... then, did the world we have lived in before and Norse mythology's world clash, becoming one?"
Nagaru nodded in response to Ouka's question.
"It's not clear when did that happen, but believing the hypothesis it might be a reconstructed world. But, there are a few things that give credibility to this hypothesis."
"...that's, can it be..."
Mari looked towards Takeru and Kanaria.
"That's right. Mistilteinn and Kana-chan's Lævateinn. Those two Magical Heritages called 'Sacred Treasures' were originally something that can't be summoned at any cost. Those two appearing in our current world without any consequences was impossible in the first place."
Something that should have been in mythological world has appeared in possession of humans in this world. What on earth could the circumstances of that be?
Lapis said that she doesn't know that herself. Since she was missing the memories from the time she was in mythological world, she was unable to explain that to Takeru.
While listening to Nagaru's words, Takeru looked at the cracked-up world once again.
...I faintly remember it.

Remnants of something like a temple. World with cracks on it. World that has ended.
There was no doubt. This scenery, this world——it was very similar to what he saw when he turned into god hunting form for the first time to kill Kiseki.
"Also, one more thing. This world is wreckage of the world of Norse mythology."
Nagaru spread her arms, overlooking the world.
"This space was blown away upon the collision of ours and Norse mythology's world, it can be considered a part of the world. People who founded the Heretic Alliance identified its coordinates and were able to navigate in here through transfer magic, using it as a home base."
"Wa-wait sec... then the place we're in now is Norse mythology's world?!"
"Half right, half wrong I guess□. This world too has been modified by the collision, the environment is similar to our world. Normally, humans wouldn't be able to live in mythological world that's filled with magic. Well, it's up to you whether you believe it or not."
If we are able to summon organisms from parallel worlds, we should be able to travel into parallel worlds, is what everyone thought. There were records of people before and after the war who tried to tried going into a mythological world, but it failed completely.
From those who went, no one has come back.
However, in the world full of debris Takeru and others were in now, it seemed like the environment of the original mythological world was gone, allowing them to live normally.
"Ouka-chan's father, Mineshiro-san seriously believed in this hypothesis and was sniffing around Ootori Sougetsu thinking he was related to it."
"....."
"And surely, he got a hold of something. As the current leader of Heretic Alliance, I think I need to know it no matter what. Even if knowing it will end up with getting killed."
Everyone made an expression saying they couldn't believe it. Although the hypothesis of worlds colliding and being rebuilt into a new world has been made a long time ago, they were unable to immediately accept it, even despite seeing the sight right in front of them.
Nagaru had an unusually serious expression, but before long she returned to her usual smile as she looked at everyone and hit her open hand with a fist.
"Oh well, I told you lots of stuff, but you don't have to think about it now. No matter what kind of place is it, it's fine as long as you understand its safe. First I'll introduce comrades that will be working with you, let's go to the student council's room."
Knowing that everyone was upset, Nagaru said so lightly for a mood change.
Somehow, the atmosphere has loosened thanks to that.
Just one person, Takeru was an exception.

"——President, where's Lapis?"
He asked Nagaru who was pressing on everyone's backs as they left the roof. With her back turned to Takeru she stopped on spot.
"Even though we've been exploring this place for a while now, her presence is very weak. She... where did you have her stay?"
"...it's okay, she's here. We took her with us."
"Then please let me meet her. There's something I need to ask her."
He seriously looked at Nagaru, as if glaring.
She responded while still turned with her back to him.
"It seems like that girl doesn't want to meet you. Also, I too want you to refrain from getting in contact with her as much as possible... I guess."
"...why? This is mine and hers problem right?"
"That's true, still..."
"——Please let me meet her. I beg you."
"T-Takeru... a request from me too. Stop using Mistilteinn... using Lapis."
Mari said so with difficulty and a trembling voice.
Takeru didn't hide his surprise.
"Mari... even you, why?"
Looking carefully, it wasn't just Mari. Usagi was looking fearfully downwards, Ikaruga was squinting as she looked away. As for Kanaria, she was glaring at him.
Ouka just closed her eyes in silence and clenched her fist.
They were obviously hiding something concerning Lapis.
Takeru wanted to question everyone but was discouraged on the verge of doing so.
"Fine. I'll ask the person herself... move aside."
Cutting through everyone, Takeru headed towards the roof's exit.
Mari stretched out her hand trying to hold him back but Nagaru stopped her.
Nagaru made a thin smile and spoke towards Takeru's back.
"...Lapis-chan is in this school's basement. If you want to meet her, do as you please."
Although there were voices from surroundings that indicated others tried to stop Nagaru, Takeru ignored that and left the roof.
What he left behind was a word of thanks to Nagaru.

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"Why did you let him go! This is where we stop him, right?!"
Mari yelled at Nagaru with a harsh voice.
Everyone else wasn't satisfied either, but they were silent.
While scratching her cheek Nagaru put a hand on Mari's shoulder.

"Even if I tried to stop him, he's already determined to meet Lapis-chan□. He'll learn it anyways, I just think it's better if he gets to know it in a convincing manner that will be convincing to him□."
Also, I'm bad at hiding things, Nagaru said insincerely.
Seeing Mari chagrin with her fist clenched Ouka spat out a sigh.
"I understand how you feel, but there's truth in what President says. Even if we stop him, Takeru won't stop."
"Even you're saying such things?! We're comrades right?! Are you going to abandon a comrade that marches towards his own harm?!"
Hearing Mari's desperate words Ouka faced downwards.
"That's not how it is. However, I feel that to Takeru, Mistilteinn is different from 'comrades' like us. Between the two there's a different, unique atmosphere."
It wasn't something to tread upon. Not something to meddle in.
Mari realized it after being told so and chewed her lower lip in chagrin.
"I know that... but I'm still not convinced. 'Cause at this rate Takeru will...!"
"Of course, I have no intention of looking it end like that. We just have to do what we are able to."
Hearing Ouka's calm, admonishing words Mari returned a serious question.
"...other than to stop him, what can we do..."
Persistently calm, Ouka quietly answered.
"Believe."
"....."
"We can believe that Takeru won't leave us and goes alone."
These were words of someone who has overcome bitter experiences.
When Kiseki was going berserk, Ouka tried to stop Takeru from going alone in god hunter form.
Don't go, she said.
Takeru shook off her hand and went alone to where Kiseki was.
However, Takeru still came back. He was reminded of his comrades in the last moment and came back.
That's why Ouka believed in Takeru, no matter how many times he ends up in a situation like that.
"...I'm not satisfied with doing just that...!"
With tears in her eyes Mari left the roof.
Ouka tried to chase after her, but then she lowered her outstretched hand.
Being the poor talker she is and unable to properly relay her feelings, she got depressed.
Nagaru who was right beside her laughed.
"It's all right. Mari-chan understands that for sure□. Also, you can do more than just believe. What I can do is only providing enough forces to allow him avoid using god hunting form, but you are different."
She cast down her eyes slightly.

"It's a fact that his and Lapis-chan's strength is essential to us□. I don't want him to release his power, but if he does it voluntarily I won't stop him. But... if it's you all, I think you'll be able to stop him."
"....."
"But I don't know how'd you do it□."
Saying so, Nagaru hit Ouka's shoulder twice.
And together with other members she left the roof.
Not following them as the last one, she remained on the roof alone.
After looking upwards at the cracked-up sky, Ouka closed her eyes.
...really, such a shrewd person. People standing on top are inevitably of that type, aren't they.
Ouka guessed what was the reason Nagaru hit her shoulder in the end. She had the power required to protect Takeru.
...but.
However, the problem when it comes to using that power didn't lie in her nor in Takeru.
It lied in a different person, one she never tried to converse with.

□□□

After he opened the door, there, was something akin to a visiting room.
The genuine AntiMagic Academy had shooting training grounds in the basement, but this seemed like a prison. There was one pipe chair in there, and one more on the other side of the glass.
That's where Lapis was sitting in quietly.
"....."
Noticing that Takeru came in Lapis expressionlessly looked towards him only once, then quickly looked away.
Lapis was angry, but not at Takeru. She was angry at Nagaru who let Takeru enter this place despite being told she doesn't want to meet him.
Currently, Takeru was able to tell even that.
"...yo."
He raised one hand and greeted her brightly.
"What's up, locking yourself in like that. Upset again?"
"....."
Even when he joked as he sat on the chair, Lapis wouldn't look towards him.
Although it seemed like what happened back in Magic Academy, the rejection now was different from before. She wasn't upset nor angry.
She was probably depressed.
"...I'm sorry."
Takeru slowly articulated an apology.
Lapis' pupils lightly shook.
".....why is Host apologizing."

"There are parts I can't recall but... I heard your voice as you tried to stop me yet I didn't stop, that's why. You've been always warning me not to remain in god hunting form for more than ten seconds, time after time again."
"....."
"I knew you were afraid of assimilation, yet I didn't stop. Falling into coma this time was my own fault. It's not your fault. You just responded to my request after all."
Without looking away, Takeru said it straight out.
Nagaru and the 35th platoon members misunderstood Lapis. In no way was she a mysterious monster or an emotionless Magical Heritage.
She was a human being possessing a proper heart.
Lapis was just as worried about Takeru's body as his comrades were, she was scared of something.
This time too, just as he told Lapis, was his own fault.
It was a mistake to isolate her like this. If someone had to be admonished, it should be him.
"...Host, did you notice my change?"
Takeru was surprised being told that all of a sudden.
"I myself was the one who requested to be pulled away from the Host. I entered this place out of my own will."
"Why do such...."
"It is because I cannot control myself."
Inside of the iron-box like room, her voice sounded very clear.
Although there was nothing reflected in her eyes, Takeru could feel guilt from the bond connecting him with Lapis.
"You must be aware of the indecipherable error that had appeared inside of me frequently."
"No, that's not really an error... that's, how to say it... it's merely you becoming more human-like and not really a bad thing——"
"——Becoming more human is the problem."
Flatly, Lapis cut in half way through his sentence. Her voice was louder than usual, like a scream.
"...what... is the problem?"
Lapis has never raised her voice before, not even once.
Takeru asked quietly, cautiously.
She dropped her line of sight to her knees and clutched the hem of her skirt.
"I didn't know what the error inside of me was for a long time. I was unable to come up with a conclusion describing my unreasonable actions. But, after returning with the Host to outside world I was finally able to find an answer."
"....."
"The starting point was an error that appeared when Host came in contact with people he refers to as 'comrades'. Each time Host time came contact

with Ootori Ouka-sama and Nikaido Mari-sama, something has ached inside of me. Every time Host's awareness was directed to someone else, something surged inside of me like a wave. Every time you smiled in someone's direction, something mysterious was swirling in my chest."
"...umm, that's..."
"I've seen that something as just an error."
At the beginning, Takeru very seriously listened to what Lapis had to say. However, he understood when he heard it and his face unwittingly turned red.
When he's in contact with anyone else, error occurs. When his awareness is turned towards directed towards someone else, error occurs.
When he smiles towards someone else other than her, error occurs.
Even thick-headed Takeru understood.
Surely, Lapis was jealous of other comrades.
She suddenly turned restless, she correcter her posture on her chair, brushed her hair with her fingers and covered her mouth with her hand, but when Takeru approached further she moved away dragging the chair with her.
As usual she faced him expressionlessly.
"N-no, wait... that's uhh... I can tell what you feel. Heck, that's not something to be afraid of is it. That's probably jealousy, right."
"....."
"I knew a long time ago you're very jealous, see? You get sulky when I try to do a practice swing or use other swords, calling it cheating. You're jealous of the sword I normally use too, right? To say, it's nothing strange, I'm uh... well, as a swordsman... having such a well-made partner possessively nestle against me... being jealous over, makes me happy to say..."
Mumbling embarrassedly, Takeru said the truth.
It were his true feelings. As a swordsman, he was tremendously happy to be loved by a sword. Lapis was a first class weapon. It was something that originally was handled only by god-class magical organisms.
Being accepted and inspiring possessiveness in her made him proud as a swordsman.
"As I thought, Host didn't notice."
"I-I said I noticed. I told you I'm happy about it. D-d-don't make me repeat it so many times."
"You are mistaken. I am not jealous as a sword. This error is something I was unable to name until now but... I noticed just recently that it's possible to express it in human language."
Hearing that, Takeru froze with a loose expression on his face.
When he raised his face dumbfounded, before he realized Lapis was staring straight at him.
Takeru was firmly reflected in her eyes.
In them, was a warm firm light that wasn't there before.
Lapis placed a hand on her chest and staring directly at Takeru she said.

"Most likely——I love you. Not as a sword, but as a human."

An error born from getting in contact with Takeru as a human and not as a sword after obtaining emotions.
The conclusion and the description Lapis drew of the error was this.
Takeru froze with his mouth half-opened, it took about thirty seconds before he could finally let out the words.
"...thank...you."
Of all things, these were the words that came out. Love. Not 'like' but 'love'. 'I love you'.
That answer which went leaps and bounds must have taken a lot from Lapis who is not familiar with expressing human emotions. Surely, Lapis didn't understand such abstract word deeply, even Takeru didn't.
It was clearly clumsy.
But, how heavy the word 'love' was.
"Ah, s-sorry! W-what I'm thanking for here... nono, thank you but, umm... this, I have to give my response right? Umm... ahh..."
Confused Takeru tried to choose the words.
It shouldn't end with just thanks, right.
However, he came up with a conclusion. It might look like indecision, but it was 'I don't know much about love between a man and woman'. That's why he didn't know if he loved Lapis as a person or not.
That's why——I don't know if I love you as a person, as a person I like you very much, and I love the sword you and want you beside me.
Uwahh... what's that, that's super uncool!
That's just being good-for-nothing isn't it. I mean, I wasn't confessed to so clearly before, no matter what excuse I make it'll be uncool. As Takeru fretted troubled, Lapis broke the ice, beginning to talk.
"I do not really desire an answer as to whether Host loves me or not. What's important now, isn't Host's answer."
"Ehh?! Is that so?!"
Still having a bright red face, he was slightly taken aback.
All I thought was about being confessed to. How embarrassing.
"What does loving someone as a human mean is still unknown to me. However, I am acutely aware that this is something very dangerous for a Magical Heritage whose ultimate goal is fusing with the user."
"...? Why liking som... um, eh, why is loving dangerous?"
Takeru could only find goods things in it.
"As a sword, I can be an existence that's your one and only. But I have no confidence of doing that as a person. That is the problem."
Lapis exhaled and squinted.
"If I embrace the affection towards the Host as a person——I will end up trying to erase what's important to Host from his memory."
Hearing the word 'erase' Takeru opened his eyes widely.

"As much as my possessiveness grows, the fusion of mine and Host's soul speeds up. Even if I try to suppress the fusion, the feelings I am unable to control refuse to stop it. Even more so, that Host has a lot of other existences important to him."
"....."
"Upon waking up you should have noticed missing memories. The preparation of the Magical Heritage and its user's fusion has reached the first stage. Removing things important to the user... removing hindrances in order to have him depend on Magical Heritage alone is undergoing."
Hindrances. Lapis clearly said so.
"I have come up with two options. First was killing all existences important to Host. That was immediately dismissed. If Host's comrades and Kiseki-sama were to be killed, Host will reject me and will never touch me again. I determined that would clearly make Host hate me."
Lapis clenched her fist on top of her knees.
"However, the other option, "Removing memories of the people important to you" would satisfy my possessiveness. If I removed all that's important to Host from his memory, there would be no reason to reject the fusion."
"....."
"If I removed memories of the hindrances——Host would be mine alone."
After she finished saying that, Lapis closed her eyes.
She knew what kind of things were Magical Heritages. Magical Heritages absolutely wouldn't forgive human heart. He had learned in one of Magic Academy required courses that a sense of distance is important when handling Magical Heritages.
The desires of Magical Heritage and people are incompatible. If human side falls behind, Magical Heritage will eat human's soul in form of fusion. Therefore, the user has to control the Magical Heritage.
Especially if it's a Sacred Treasure. A Sacred Treasure is impossible for a human to handle, that was the reason a soul more powerful than a human's is required.
".....Host."
Lapis faintly opened her eyes and looked at Takeru.
From the beginning until the end, not even once Takeru did move his gaze away from her.
"You told me you are all right. I too, thought that as long as I'm by your side as a sword, the fusion will be suppressed. But... it seems like I am unable to go against the nature of a Sacred Treasure. From the very beginning, I was that kind of *thing*. After attaining human emotions, I am no longer able to restrain myself."
She stood up from the chair.
"I can no longer respond to Host's expectations. I don't want to steal anything else from Host. I am painfully aware that Host doesn't want that. That's why."

And, with tears flowing from her eyes she requested of Takeru in trembling voice.

And, with tears flowing from her eyes she requested of Takeru in trembling voice.
"That's why I implore you, please let go of me."

"That's why I implore you, please let go of me."

"I refuse."

Takeru stood up from the chair and discarded Lapis request saying so.
It was an immediate answer. There was no hesitation whatsoever.
He furrowed his eyebrows.
"I've said it right. I promised that I won't let go of you ever again, no matter what happens."
"...but if Host continues to use me, you will forget everything. The one who broke the promise is me. What you requested of me, I was unable to restrain myself."
"The reason my memory is missing is because I didn't adhere to the time limit. It's not your fault."
"It's no longer a matter of time. According to the analysis result of the emotions born inside of me, clearly I will be unable to stop myself again."
"No such thing..! If you really intended to fuse with my soul, you would already have done it long time ago!"
"...that's..."
"I want to be your Host forever! Both of you as a sword and as a person!"
In response to what Takeru said, Lapis downcast her face.
He relaxed his shoulders and put a hand on the glass between them.
"I beg you, partner... if you are hurt, then so am I..."
"...Host."
"I won't let you go in exchange for what's important to me... after all, you too are someone important to me."
Seriously, as if spitting blood Takeru said so.
Even as she faintly hesitated, Lapis reached with her hand to Takeru's palm on the glass.
However, on the verge of overlapping with Takeru's hand, her hand was lowered powerlessly.

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After Takeru has left the room, Lapis looked up at the ceiling while still sitting in the chair.
"....."
The error swirling inside of her was discharged to Takeru as it was, but she was still bewildered.
She came up wit conclusion for the error by herself. Until now she continued to deny her feelings, but she had to admit them now.
She had a heart with same properties as that of a human. She noticed that when she made a contract with Takeru for the second time in Magic Academy. Rather than joy, she rather felt it was mysterious.

During this god hunting form it has changed to fear. Her greed for monopoly was a little strong even compared to that of an average human. But, the problem was that she was a Magical Heritage, a Sacred Treasure. No matter how much she tries to restrain her emotions, body of magic faithfully responds to her desires.
It was a very similar situation to that of Takeru's little sister, Kusanagi Kiseki. Until now it didn't worry her in the least and she wasn't interested in it, but now she was able to understand her suffering.
For the first time since she was born, she thought she would be happier being born a human and not a Magical Heritage.
No, that was wrong. She just wasn't aware of it before, this was the second time.
"...will... it repeat again...?"
When Lapis questioned herself, the door Takeru went out through has opened again.
The one standing on the other side of opened doors was Ootori Ouka.
"....."
Ouka looked at lonely Lapis and then she too sat down in the chair.
"...it's the first time we speak to each other, just two of us isn't it."
"....."
"Or rather, isn't this the first time we talk properly at all? I mean, I hated Magical Heritages before."
She gestured as if she was exploring her memory.
"...what do you want?"
"I was concerned, that's all. You told Takeru everything, right? How was it?"
Hearing her say so, meddling in so bluntly Lapis felt haze inside of her chest.
In the world there are people without tact, people who are said to be unable to read the mood, Lapis thought. After coming to this space through transfer magic, she told everyone that she wants to be confined and unable to get in contact with Takeru, as well as explained the reasons for that. Nagaru and Ouka seemed to expect it to an extent and were unfazed, Usagi looked like she was about to cry, Mari seemed like she would grasp her by the clothes any time. Surprisingly, the one who was most hostile towards Lapis was Ikaruga.
Lapis was well aware that she wasn't accepted by Takeru's comrades. She didn't really feel anything in that respect.
The reason Ouka has come to her too, was probably because she was worried about Takeru. Just as Lapis thought of Ouka as of existence that's in the way, Ouka shouldn't harbour any feelings towards her as well. That's why she didn't mind whether Ouka knew or not.
"I told Host to let go of me. Host's wishes and my desires as a Magical Heritage don't match, if the contract continues as it is, the results will be disastrous."
"Hmm. And, what did he say?"

"He thoroughly refused."
"Pft, ahahahahahahahaha!"
Ouka begun to laugh holding her belly, tears pooled in her eyes.
What is she laughing about. If Takeru's memories are erased, he might cease to be himself, what is this woman laughing so hard at.
One question after another, Lapis felt a strange irritation.
Ouka looked at Lapis with one eye opened and apologized with "sorry about that".
"See, I thought Takeru would answer like that. I couldn't bear it and burst out laughing. Forgive me."
The corners of Lapis mouth moved faintly. Ouka saw it clearly.
"Ohh... seems like what Takeru said was true. I thought you were an expressionless, emotionless woman, but there are proper changes in your expressions. Right now you're very irritated aren't you?"
"...what is it with you. What did you come here for, really."
"I told you. I was concerned and came to check on you."
And once again, she tried to suppress her laughter. It was truly uncomfortable.
"Why are you laughing so cheerfully. The fact that Host doesn't want to let go of me means that one day he will end up fusing with me. He will forget his comrades, forget you and become mine alone. Are you content with it?""
Lapis said it very quickly, restlessly. Ouka strongly leaned with her back on the chair.
"I'm not. Not at all. If I were to lose and have him taken away by someone else I could still accept it, but I wouldn't be able to stand an outcome of him being snatched away by a Magical Heritage like you."
Maybe it's because she wasn't a human that Ouka confessed her feelings without any embarrassment.
If it were in front of platoon members, it probably wouldn't happen like this.
Maybe Ouka was looking down on Lapis, no, that wasn't it. Ouka's eyes indicated she clearly saw her as an enemy.
"Then, why won't you persuade Host to let go of me? Or maybe isolate me, put in effort to destroy me?"
"I refuse. I think Takeru wants to be together with you. I have no intention of betraying those feelings of his. Since Takeru wishes for it, you should stay by his side."
"...I cannot comprehend. You are contradicting yourself. I am a threat to you, I should have been recognized as an enemy."
Just like she sees Ouka and other members, Ouka should have done so.
Lapis thought so.
Suddenly, with abandon Ouka hit the glass with the palm of her hand.
"——Don't run away."
Ouka said so while glaring at Lapis with her blue eyes.
Lapis' shoulders trembled slightly.

"Let go because you can't restrain your emotions? Get away because you can't resist the nature of a Magical Heritage? Are you going to shake off Takeru's hand who reaches out to you despite being well aware of that?"
"....."
"How many things do you think Takeru is going against? He's shouldering a number of things of lousy people like me and yet he proceeds forward."
That was something Lapis knew as well. She knew and needn't be told that. She knew just how desperately he confronted the threats since she was the closest one to him.
"I'm telling you to resist, oppose it. If you're the one closest to him, that's what you should do. Resist nature of a Sacred Treasure, your own feelings, show yourself in a satisfactory state."
Lapis looked downwards.
Resist, obtain satisfactory results with her own hands.
She knew it even without being told that by a woman who was at mercy of her revenge.
"Then I, what should I do... how do I oppose it? I don't know how. What else can I do...?"
"So thou doest not know, Parasite——then I shall teach thou!"
A voice has sounded abruptly.
Out of nowhere, a voice has come from an empty place.
The moment Lapis looked up, he appeared along with a crimson magical circle.
Two huge handguns. Ouka's partner.
"Immature, immature, thou're so immature. Sacr'd treasure 'r whatever, as a magical heritage ye are a mere brat. trying to englut thy host, this disqualifies thou to be a mere parasite. "
"...Vlad..."
"As thy user Kusanagi Takeru is far below thou as thy user. It's not his art, it's his existence. 'Tis evident that due to lack of moderation he's being devour'd by thou. O' Sacr'd Treasure who chose thy master incorrectly. That is wherefore I say ye are a parasite——"
clingg
Ouka stopped Vlad who started to preach like an old man.
"Stop agitating her, fool. You're an irregular-type Magical Heritage as well aren't you. Stop trying to act important."
"Hmph. Even if mine history as a Magical Heritage is shallow, it's clear that's she's a parasite. It makes me feel like delivering a sermon. "
"Shut up, gun... hurry up say what you want, and go back..."
Ouka sighed in response to Vlad's disrespectful attitude.
Since they were transferred to a parallel world, his link with Ootori Sougetsu was probably cut. That's why he was able to manifest normally like this.
But she couldn't understand.

Why would a Magical Heritage like Vlad teach Lapis a method of resisting their nature.
"You doubt me? I told thou I shall teach thou. The balance between thou and thy master is poor. he can handle thou, but thou're not equal. Argal thou can no longer avoid fusing. "
"...I know that even without being told that by you. That's why I do this."
"However——with power of mine 'tis possible to stop thy and thy master's fusion. "
For a moment, she didn't understand what Vlad meant.
However, after thinking for a few seconds Lapis opened her eyes widely.
Seeing that reaction Ouka raised her index finger.
"There is one method to oppose it. It's having me and Vlad help. You know that Vlad's intrinsic performance is penetrating all magic as long as we know its operative procedure, don't you?"
"....."
"I was in a state where I was being taken over by Mephistopheles, but I released your Witch Hunter form. If you tell me the operative procedure of your god hunter form, you know that I'll definitely be able to penetrate and cancel it, right?"
Just as Ouka said, it was true that she cancelled Lapis' witch hunter form before.
Still, that was just the witch hunting form. In case of god hunting form it was a completely different story.
However, god hunting form was also magic. It was possible to use only with Twilight magical power's property and required a soul beyond that of a human, but magic was still magic.
Although there was a precedent of fusion failing, there was none of it being cancelled.
Just, there was no precedent. It wasn't attempted before.
Lapis knew that Vlad's intrinsic performance was effective against all magic. He was able to penetrate and reverse-build an operative procedure.
Night Blood magical property was effective against Twilight magical property, judging by the fact it has penetrated witch hunter form before.
In that case it could be used in case of emergency, couldn't it?"
"However, god hunting form's operative procedure is complex. It's unknown if human can understand it."
"Have no fear. I have memorized majority of magic's operative procedures in this world, you know? It's not impossible."
"I shall cooperate in deciphering it. No matter how disappointing master's brain is, I'll show thou I can force it into her."

In perfect sync, the two spoke in similar tone as if they were a parent and child. Seeing the two act confidently, Lapis faced downwards.
Lapis was perplexed. It was a strange feeling. She didn't understand Ouka's speculation and didn't know Vlad's reason for cooperating.
Yet strangely, she didn't feel it was bad.
Seeing a clue to resolving the issue, even bewildered, she was still relieved.
Ouka put her fist on the glass and knocked on it.
And smiling thinly she relayed her feelings to Lapis.
"Mistilteinn... no, Lapis Lazuli. You are not alone, we are with you."
"....."
"That's why, you too, struggle with all you have."
Lapis stared back in Ouka's eyes that were devoid of hesitation.
Her answer was decided upon.
She couldn't find a reason to refuse.
This was the first time Lapis decided to put her hope and rely on someone else other than herself or Takeru.

Chapter 2 - Gathering of Heretics

——Heretic Alliance. That's a gathering of dissidents of both the outside and inside alike, it's a patchwork organization so to speak.
Just like 'alliance' in the name suggests, it was just a group that cooperated only because their interest were matching, they all had different philosophy, beliefs and their own objectives.
The organizations that discovered the existence of Heretic Alliance always criticize them.
There's no way such an organization would be established. Even if it was, it wouldn't be able to last a long time, it'll easily collapse and it can't be a dangerous group.
It was recognized as a full-fledged organization in the generation during which Mineshiro Kazuma was its leader.
"As expected, it's impossible to call in everyone, but two teams have come so that we can show you what kind of organization is it."
Sitting cross-legged on the chair Nagaru spread out her hands.
The place 35th platoon was in now, was AntiMagic Academy's student council room... or so it seemed. Eighteen people including 35th platoon have gathered inside of it.
There was 35th Test Platoon wearing green AntiMagic Academy uniforms, still fresh in our minds red uniforms and a group in white we saw for the first time.
All of them were young, at a glance it was obvious that they aren't adults.
People in the red clothing were familiar, whether it was their faces or clothes.
"...Takeru, those guys."
Mari whispered to Takeru.
"Yeah... its the bunch that was with President when we came back. If I'm not wrong, they were seventh squad... Kanaria, you should know more details right?"
"...hmph. I did cooperate with Eliza, but I don't know anyone in Pureblood Party."
Kanaria folded her arms and faced sideways, she didn't even try looking at the bunch she wasn't interested in.
Ouka, Usagi and Ikaruga also fought against Pureblood Party in battles defending the border, killed their comrades and had their comrades killed as well. They weren't calm inside and naturally started to glare at them.
Takeru spoke with them only once, so he didn't know what kind of people were they.
He watched their captain with mixed feelings, probably noticing his line of sight the leader-like man in red clothes looked towards Takeru.
When their eyes met, Takeru hid his steep expression in a hurry.
The boy with reddish-blond hair had shapely features, but he seemed like a moody person.

"Okay, I'll quickly introduce you□. These red people are Pureblood Party's seventh student squad."
Nagaru turned towards the seventh student squad on the right.
"Just like Kusanagi-kun and the others they came to Heretic Alliance's home base just recently. Kusanagi-kun, Mari-chan and Kanaria-chan knows them right?"
Takeru nodded awkwardly.
That's when, captain of the seventh squad took a step forward and shown a salute of Pureblood Party.
"I'm Magical Academy West Side Pureblood Party's seventh student squad's captain, Sage. Things happened and I didn't say my name before."
Sage said so with a sophisticated tone and behaviour, then looked at Kanaria.
She felt the line of sight and immediately glared at him.
"Although you probably know Pureblood Party's philosophy, we're dissidents. I would like it if you understood that we have no intentions of spreading the philosophy of the current pureblood system. Since we're temporarily forming an alliance, we will not impose our philosophy on you. Whether its demihumans or humans without magical power, I want us to think of each other as equal comrades. Fellow heretics, please take care of us."
"....."
"That is all."
After he finished speaking, Sage stepped back briskly. He glanced at Takeru only once and made a small nod before immediately turning away.
Takeru noticed what was Sage's intention.
Surely, in order to lessen their alertness he made an explanation as he introduced himself.
At the very least Takeru has become less wary. There was no one who wouldn't understand what Sage said.
"Yup, be friee□nds kai. So, next□."
This time Nagaru tried to turn towards the left where the people in white clothing were, but suddenly a heavy, loud **thud** has resounded.
One of the people in white clothing took a step forward and at the same time hit the ground with a spear she held.
It was a girl with tied up, long black hair. Unlike other people in white clothing, she wasn't wearing a robe, but something like an armour.
"——God's Embers, sixth miko guards' captain, Mikado Yuzuho."
With completely condescending attitude the girl identified herself as Yuzuho.
At the same time Ouka raised a surprised voice.
"God's Embers...? President, did you even include such a bunch in the alliance?!!"
When Ouka beside him loudly spoke, Takeru nervously pat Ikaruga's and Usagi's shoulders.

"H-hey, what's 'God's Embers'...?"
".....Kusanagi, as expected you are dumb."
Takeru was seriously hurt by Usagi who said he was stupid.
"God's Embers is the largest unofficial religious group in the modern times. It's an organization that was born after Buddhists and Catholics have been weeded out. After gods have been recognized not as a subject of worship but as magical organisms, it's a bunch that started preaching about a more significant and sublime existence. Originally it was a grey-zone organization, but Inquisition's governing has made it certified black. It was quite a rampage so you must have seen it in news, right?"
"I-I've no clue... in my place there's no TV."
Ikaruga and Usagi sighed deeply.
That's when the God's Embers captain has shoved the point of the spear at Ouka's neck so fast it was almost invisible.
One could realize immediately that she was very skilful spearsmanship user. The speed of her rush in was abnormal. Even Takeru would have trouble avoiding it without using Magic-Sweeping SwordSoumatou.
Soundlessly Yuzuho thrust so far she almost touched the skin on Ouka's neck and glared at her. Ouka was unfazed, she coldly looked down on Yuzuho.
"We are apostates just like you, but we have no intention of getting along with users of black magic. We do not care what kind of actions you are undertaking, but if you insult the apostles of the embers I shall cut your head down."
"It's not an insult but vigilance. Inquisition burned its hands on you for a long time. Being told to partner up with you bunch all of a sudden is impossible. I won't let you say you forgot about the indiscriminate terrorist attack two years ago."
"That was something extremists have done. Our true believers do not sacrifice innocent general public, even if they are atheists. Please rest assured, we have no intentions whatsoever of partnering up with barbarians. We are going to act freely by ourselves."
Both of them have went "hmph" at each other and returned back to their spots.
...that seems like it'll be a huge pain in the ass.
Takeru felt his mood turn heavy.
"Okaay□, then next, Kusanagi-kun."
Being suddenly called by name Takeru panicked.
Not good, I can't think of anything.
For the time being, Takeru nervously moved in front.
"Eh, umm?! Uhh, I'm AntiMagic Academy 35th Platoon's captain, Kusanagi Takeru! I'm good at swordsmanship and I can't do anything else. Even in school my performance was poor, aha-ahaha, I'm a dropout. Also, uh, um... my hobb□"

Losing his calm completely, Takeru acted all fidgety scratching his cheek and patting his clothes unable to settle down.
He was grabbed from behind by Mari, Usagi and Kanaria, then pulled back.
"Why on earth are you doing a self-introduction for classmates...!"
"Despite usually naming yourself pointlessly cool, why does it end up like this in a critical moment. Be more dignified, c'mon...!"
"That now wasn't good! We are being completely underestimated! Good-for-nothing Takeru...!"
The three got angry at him, causing Takeru panic further. Next to them Ikaruga was bending over holding her mouth trying to endure laughter and Ouka put a hand on her forehead and looked up to the heavens.
Gods' Embers Yuzuho looked towards him in a ridiculing manner and Sage closed his eyes not moving a budge.
Takeru made a cramped up smile, thinking he should conclude it and raised one hand.
"N-nice to meet you all! I-if possible, l-let's get along."
...even he himself thought it was a horrible ending and slumped, depressed.
Why of all things this 3-way struggle. It wasn't that the other two managed it well, but the three groups were each other's enemies.
Doing it well all of a sudden was impossible.
However, Nagaru probably thought of this. Heretic Alliance was that kind of organization in the first place. Her ability to put together an alliance was immeasurable.
"That'll be meeting face-to-face done. ——Yup! It seems like everyone will do well!"
...he got anxious. Nagaru made a broad smile and raised her forefinger.
"Ah, you think I didn't choose suitably? There's a reason why I have gathered these members□."
If there wasn't any, that would be a huge problem.
The three groups mutually wary of each other focused on what Nagaru said.
"All three teams here have different objectives. Your philosophies are different and your beliefs don't match. Buy you see□, even if you have different objectives your direction is similar."
Nagaru rotated on the chair with a twirl.
The objective of three groups are similar? Takeru didn't think so.
On one hand there were pureblood sorcerers that are part of an actual world power, Pureblood Party. On the other there was a group of people believing into a god no one has confirmed to exist, fanatics who are trying to spread their teachings.
And their own, previous affiliation was an organization that branded those two groups heretics and hunted them down. He thought they didn't overlap anywhere.
"We Heretic Alliance don't have a principle like pure blood, faith or weeding out magic, we have no concept that is the pillar of our existence. If I were forced to name something it would be 'status quo and stability' as the

philosophy of our activities. That is why I have accepted those who were previously enemies. The criteria of acceptance aren't based on organization but on the individuals."
Individuals... in other words the individual's human nature was emphasized on.
That must have made the organization way too unstable. There was no future for an organization without a concept. It shouldn't hold well without a theme, concept and planning.
"Those three teams have their own personal circumstances unrelated to their organizations. None of you have joined the Heretic Alliance for your philosophy or your organization. It might seem like that on the surface, but underlying that there's a different purpose."
Hearing Nagaru's words, Takeru looked at the palm of his hand.
Personal circumstances... certainly there were some.
35th Test Platoon didn't move for the sake of Inquisition's philosophy in the first place. From the very beginning Takeru worked for money and for his little sister, Ouka for her revenge, Usagi because of her family circumstances, Ikaruga left the Alchemist and looking for her own place she came to Inquisition. Kanaria came over to meet with Ikaruga. Thinking of that, 35th platoon's team was just as Nagaru described it.
...for comrades, and for my little sister... is it.
Can it be that the other two teams were the same? He glanced at Sage's and Yuzuho's complexion. Sage quietly dropped his line of sight at the ground and Yuzuho glared at Nagaru.
"Your objectives are an important factor that can lead to preventing the war from growing worse. Just like our opponents are individuals affecting the world, your individual activities are consistent with our philosophy. That's why it's not a federation but an alliance."
Nagaru stopped the chair's rotation with her legs and made a firm expression.
"Currently, what's in the centre of this world's huge vortex aren't organizations but individuals. In other words, individuals trying to change the world. Having the intentions of individuals cause a war is a dreadful thing, is it not."
With serious expression she continued to talk.
It's not even dictators, it's the speculations of individuals that move the world. Not just the countries, they pull the entire world in it. Takeru knew of a person like that.
"Inquisition's Ootori Sougetsu, Fantasy Cult'sValhalla's Mother Goose, Alchemist's Suginami Suzaku... those people are our enemies. If we don't prioritize stopping those people, this world might perish."
Takeru's heartbeat has sped up.
He couldn't hide his surprise seeing Mother Goose was included among their enemies. Certainly, Ryu should have been in contact with Mother Goose... or rather, with Orochi.

Speaking of which... I don't know what's their objective... they said they are going to stop the war, but is there something else...?
He felt a buzz in his chest. While Takeru trust Orochi as his swordsmanship teacher, he didn't know him that deeply. It was because he was a person who didn't speak of himself much.
In case of Mother Goose it goes without saying.
"I gathered you all this time because I want these three teams to attack a certain facility."
Hearing those words lacking calm, a shiver ran through everyone on spot. While they thought Heretic Alliance was a completely non-combat organization, it was very abrupt talk.
Nagaru crossed her legs and clapped.
"——I'll have you guys to take down Alchemist's First Research Centre. For the three teams gathered here that location should be of highest priority,*you have business to do there don't you.*"
Mari, Usagi and Ouka looked towards Takeru, Ikaruga and Kanaria who grimaced strongly.
Takeru grit his teeth and clenched his fist. Pupils in Ikaruga's wide-opened eyes shook strongly, Kanaria hit the palm of her hand with a fist, full of fighting spirit.
The folks from Pureblood Party and Gods' Embers reacted in the same manner.
"I intend to prepare other forces as well. That's why it's okay if you leave the suppression to other personnel. I don't mind if you do what you're ought to do in that place."
Nagaru looked towards all the people in the room, then folded her arms in front of her chest.
"I promised you that I'll definitely help you out, right. Leave the political problems and post-processing after the operation to me and other people on top, you don't need to think of anything, you can go full reckless to save those you want to save."
Then she made a slightly bad-natured smile.
"No need for compensation. Your objective——will turn into Heretic Alliance's result after all."
...fu fu fu.
And so, Nagaru gloated with a scheming smile, but because of her childish appearance she didn't look the part.
"Aw, no good. My face's tired out."
She immediately returned to her usual carefree look and massaged her cheeks strongly.
With a riding motion Nagaru stood up from the chair and stretched grandly.
"I'll contact you with details on the operation at later date□. Well then, with that said——I leave the rest to you, Kusanagi-kun."
While saying so Nagaru grasped the knob of the student council room's door to open it.

When finally they were about to move to save Kiseki and he tried to suppress excitement, suddenly he's become the centre of attention.
"——What?!"
"I think that team members from different powers must have something to talk about□. In order for it to go well interaction is important right. Inter-cultural communication?"
"Noo, waitt, eh?!"
"I left the prepared tea and sweets on the shelf□. Use it as you please and get along□."
Nagaru waved her hand exaggeratedly and left the student council room.
Takeru left behind lowered his hand that had nowhere to go and stood in daze on spot, paralysed.
".....dumping it all on me?!"
And of all things she puts me in charge, Takeru lamented.
Putting together a team made up of feuding organizations made her seem skilful... he thought so, but apparently she was a leader below his expectations.

After 20 minutes, naturally, the student council room was overtaken by silence.
Although each team sat down by the U-shaped desk that was installed in, no one attempted any communication and there was a heavy atmosphere in the student council room as if a summit was being carried out.
The 35th platoon has gathered in the centre of the long desk. To the left of the platoon there was 'Gods' Embers' guard troop and to the right there was the seventh squad of the 'Pureblood Party'.
The captain of guard troop, Yuzuho glared at the Small Fry Platoon and the seventh squad the entire time and the white clothed members behind her whispered to each other behind her back. Sage from the seventh squad folded his arms and didn't move at all, his members made grumpy expressions.
Caught in between, Takeru from the Small Fry Platoon was glancing on both sides checking on their complexion, becoming smaller and smaller.
Ouka was sitting with a stern expression, Mari was resting her chin on a hand and continued to hit the desk with her fingers. Usagi was fidgeting and repositioning herself on the chair. Kanaria already left from the place and Ikaruga also went out chasing after her.
Takeru really wanted to follow after them, but he wasn't that irresponsible to leave on this occasion.
Ahh... this stomach pain, it's a little nostalgic.
Staring into the distance, Takeru turned pure white.
"...what to do with... this situation."
Frustrated Mari was swearing under her breath.
"Don't just rely on others and think by yourself too."
Ouka sighed and admonished Mari.

"I'm properly thinking about it... in the first place it's that shorties' fault for passing this entire thing on us. It's impossible for Takeru to do anything in this situation, isn't it."
"It might be so but... you really are always complaining. Use your head for something else other than magic."
Grr, Mari got angry.
"You too, isn't it just that all the nutrition went to your breasts and there's enough for your head? Heck, I don't think you've any ideas whatsoever about communication, do you?"
"Ngrr... I'm aware of that without needing you tell me. That's why I'm desperately thinking of it. Also, I don't think you're in position to call President a shorty, are you?"
"?! N-no no, I'm not as short as her...! Well, I might seem short for this platoon but... heck, why are you insulting me in this situation? Trying to unload irritation you have for not being able to resolve this stalemate?"
"You're the one who snapped at me first...!"
The way it grew suggested they won't quarrel seriously, but those two were still the same as usual.
Rather than in the two the problem is me, Takeru reproached himself.
I need to do something. At the very least the members have to introduce themselves to each other. In the important operation cooperation will be crucial.
How do I speak up... and so Takeru was at a loss.
"...humm."
Suddenly, Usagi clenched both her fists and stood up.
All the platoon members were startled. They didn't think that in this situation, of all people Usagi would take action.
Takeru tried to stop her, but was stopped by Mari and Ouka instead.
Nervous Usagi moved in a stiff manner and walked up to the shelf in the student council room. Her legs trembled as she moved her hands.
Everyone's line of sight has been attracted to Usagi, she took out teacups from the shelf, put tea leaves into teapot and poured in hot water.
Then she poured steaming tea into teacup and carried them on a tray.
It seemed very uncertain, but Takeru was impressed by Usagi taking action.
Whenever she was in public or when she was sniping, Usagi started to hyperventilate and yet now in this situation she took action by herself to pour tea.
"H-hh-here, p-please."
With red face Usagi held out one cup of tea at a time to the members of the seventh squad.
As expected, the folks from Pureblood Party pick the tea up. The female members have looked at Usagi with despise.
Withstanding such lines of sight, Usagi offered the tea to Sage.
Sage had his eyes closed the entire time, but when he was offered tea he opened them.

"…I'm sorry. Thank you."
As soon as Sage was given the tea he picked it up and raised it up to his mouth.
The members of the seventh squad were all shocked.
"C-Captain…?!"
"Nn… Assam, huh. As expected with the tea leaves from the outside, bathed in pure unfiltered sunlight, both the scent and the depth is different. Preparations seems perfect as well."
"T-that's not the problem! Why would you drink tea prepared by a woman from the outside!"
"It's just tea, and delicious too. What is the problem?"
While his members were confused, Sage raised the cup higher and thanked Usagi.
Following their leader, the members of seventh squad reluctantly raised the tea up to their mouths.
Everyone was surprised and made an unconvinced expression, that was surely because it was unexpectedly delicious.
Usagi's face turned very bright.
I did it, Kusanagi…!
Since that's what he heard when he saw her expression, Takeru raised his thumb in 'good job' gesture. Continuing in the same manner, she brought tea to the members of Gods' Embers.
The members of the guards received the tea from broadly smiling Usagi, and swallowed up by that smile they politely bowed their heads.
Their captain was as she was, but the members seemed surprisingly sociable. And in the end, she gave it to the captain Yuzuho.
When Yuzuho was given tea, she responded with a "hmph."
"——These black magi sure are careless. They didn't even consider possibility of poison being in the tea, it's depressing to think people like that participate in the same operation."
Yuzuho didn't take the tea in her hand and just glared strongly at Sage.
All the members of the guards who were raising the tea to their mouth stopped at once, and regretfully once again put the tea on the desk.
The female member beside Yuzuho nervously tried to stop her from acting provocative, but she lacked courage to do it properly and turned silent.
Provoked Sage quietly drank a sip of tea and opened his eyes.
"Naturally, Pureblood Party are aristocracy. We respect etiquette. Also, even if there was poison in this tea, we know magic that could neutralize it… I have no need to proceed while acting paranoid like you do."
"Neutralizing poison… is it. If you can neutralize poison, that means you can also generate poison right? I see, techniques to be expected of those using black magic. The miracles we are dealing with focus on healing rather than neutralizing."

The conversation between captains has begun. It was good that it did, but the atmosphere seemed bad. Takeru thought he should have joined, but there was no way for him to enter this topic.
"Black magic, is a very archaic phrase. The miracles you are referring to would be recovery magic. We handle that as well."
When Sage said that casually, Yuzuho furrowed her eyebrows.
"...how rude... our miracles manifested are not magic...!"
"You call magic miracles and operative procedures the etiquette, but while the details are different it's the same thing."
"Miracles are gift of faith! Don't lump us together with heretics like you!"
"If we are heretics, then so are you. Also... what are you saying this late, after seeking assistance of an organization named Heretic Alliance."
Sage said that and the seventh squad quietly laughed.
Yuzuho turned red up to her ears and the members of the guard troop have all gotten nervous.
That's when Yuzuho's anger exploded and she destroyed the long table with her spear.
Along with the loud sound, the atmosphere in the room has heated up.
All the members of the seventh squad put their hands on the wands by their waists.
Sage stopped everyone with one hand and stood up.
"At first you told us not to insult your philosophy but... if you continue to abuse us calling us heretics, we will not remain silent."
"These are not insults, it's aversion. If not for sorcerers like you, our devotees wouldn't have been judged as heretics...! It's your, black magi fault that believing in God is being condemned as heresy!"
"That's an extreme accusation. It can be proved that miracles are magic by tracing back to their roots."
"Be silent! You heretics refer to yourself as purebloods and brandish the power and violence! I shall purify your mud-like, dirty blood right here!"
When his blood was called dirty, a shadow appeared on Sage's face.
And, he slowly pulled out the sword-shaped wand he had by his waist.
"...I don't mind if you call my blood dirty, I'm accustomed to it."
A dignified voice that seemed like it came from the bottom of hell has resounded.
"However——if you defile the pride of my comrades who are in here, I shall not forgive you."
With his eyes stained with anger, Sage took up the wand in form of a short sword.
The seventh squad followed him and also pulled out their wands and entered battle readiness, members of the guard troops also timidly grasped their rosaries.
Sage expanded a brown-coloured magical circle and Yuzuho expanded a silver-coloured one that had a cross engraved on it.
And the next moment,

"Howl——Hrunting!"
"Purify! ——Bartolomeo!"
They ran out in front to attack each other with their Magical Heritages. As expected, the fight of those two conflicting factions was unavoidable. As long as they were bearing their hatred, the collision was inevitable.
But——in the following instant, there was gunfire and sound similar to glass crumbling.
" "———?!" "
"That's enough."
Between Yuzuho and Sage who should have collided, stood Takeru. He grasped Sage's arm who was swinging the sword up with one hand and held Yuzuho's spear's handle stopping it with the other.
Both Sage and Yuzuho had their eyes wide open with surprise. No matter how much the two tried to move their weapons, they wouldn't even budge.
As a close combat specialist, Takeru knew how did they use their strength to wield the weapons.
It was easy to stop a short sword by grasping the arm when it was swung up, to thrust with a spear user had to pull it back first so it was easy to stop it as long as he aimed for that moment. To stop the attacks of close range weapon users it was important to suppress the enemy's strength that goes into attack just before it.
One hand was enough.
"Like this, I can take away your Magical Heritages. The reason I'm not doing so, is because I want work well with you."
" ".....nghh." "
"...I don't want to dirty your pride as captains by depriving you of weapons."
Sage and Yuzuho looked away from Takeru and towards to the comrades behind them.
The guard troops attack was blocked by Mari's protective barrier and the seventh squad's attack was stopped by Ouka who used Vlad to take down their wands.
Takeru exhaled relieved and grimaced.
"I want you two captains grant me a moment. Order your subordinates absolutely not to fight while we're not here."
" "....." "
"If you do so, I'll move my hands away."
The two, Sage and Yuzuho glared at Takeru who hasn't made a serious expression until now.
The silence has lasted for about 10 seconds and the first one to yield was Sage. Yuzuho was unconvinced, but she too ordered her comrades.
Then in the end, Takeru ordered the same to his comrades and left the three left the student council room.

Takeru took Sage and Yuzuho and they came to the school's rooftop.
Under the sky full of cracks he grandly stretched.

"Mm□, after I heard we're in a mythological world I couldn't believe it for an hour, I didn't think it would have such a good atmosphere□."
" "....." "
"Were your comrades okay when they first came here? The pressure is quite high here, one of our members had a mountain sickness after coming. You know, that girl who prepared tea. Her name's Usagi, she had a terrible headache□ it was tough."
While saying some unimportant things Takeru looked back at the two. Sage had his arms crossed and closed eyes, Yuzuho was looking away.
He smiled wryly seeing the two as usual, then with a "heave-ho" he sat down on the edge of the fence.
"...why did you call captains alone. If you want to talk, that place was good enough."
"...I can tell your underlying motives. You will crush the captains alone and enforce Inquisition's violence right?"
Said Sage with appalled expression and super cautious Yuzuho.
Takeru scratched his cheek and went down to business.
"The reason I called you here, is because I thought there's something we couldn't speak about in front of your members. Well, it's about captains spitting out whatever is on our heart."
"...sorry, but I have no intention of getting along. I respect courtesy, but without a doubt our three factions are like water and oil. Anything other than keeping the exchange to minimum is unnecessary."
"Isn't 'spitting out' quite a vulgar phrase. You want to grasp our weaknesses and use them against us, right? I won't let that happen."
Seeing the two act stubbornly, Takeru narrowed his eyes.
"No, I have no intention of getting along either. I just want to work properly with you, not make friends here."
In fact he thought that it was possible for them to get along, but to do so, more time was necessary.
He thought it was better to convince them this way for now.
"At first President said that we have personal objectives that are overlapping. Each of us should have a goal that involves Alchemist. I want to know what it is."
"...why. What will you do with the knowledge."
"If we know about each other we'll be able to decide whether we cooperate or not, right?"
While saying so, Takeru extended his right fist.
"——I have someone I need to rescue no matter what. But to save that person, I don't have enough strength. I need help other than the platoon's. Don't you have similar circumstances?"
" "....." "
"The three of us should know each other's reasons. With knowledge of your circumstances I'll be able to judge whether I will help you and cooperate or not. You too, listen to my story and decide by yourselves."

Takeru pulled back his fist and joined his hands on top of his knees.
And he began to speak.
About existence he wants to save, various hardships and experiences with his comrades and the destiny he's carrying. He spat out all of it.
His proposal of spitting out everything was just as he told the two earlier.
Their philosophy and beliefs, organizations and cultures were different so they couldn't understand each other. For the two to understand each other it was important for the individuals to know each other. Regardless of their philosophy and beliefs, they had their personal circumstances.
It's precisely because each team had someone to save that they have joined the Heretic Alliance. Since they had a common point, if they spoke of it frankly they could cooperate.
That's how Takeru thought.
"——I will save my little sister, then I want a place for my comrades to live in peace. That's why I'm here."
After hearing his way too fierce story, there was a change in Yuzuho's expression. A sentiment... or rather, she looked puzzled by the amount of parts overlapping with hers.
She clearly looked at him in a different manner.
Unchanged from earlier, Sage quietly listened to Takeru. However,
"...after hearing this much of your circumstances, I guess I can't go on without saying mine."
He slightly opened his closed eyes and started to talk about his upbringing and the person he had to save.
"My troop is a squad of dropouts despised in the West Side's Magic Academy. Even if we are purebloods, it doesn't necessarily mean we are talented. Even in the organization dropouts exist."
"...is that so... but you look quite talented to me."
Takeru didn't intend to interject, but still said that.
"The stigma of a dropout doesn't come from whether one is talented or not. In my case, it's because the property I hold is dirty."
"....."
"My 'Rust' property reminds people of West Side of rotten blood. My comrades are the same, they have excellent properties but no talent to build operative procedures, excel in all respects yet have low amounts of magical power, hold detestable properties... and so on, they are prejudiced for having such shortcomings. Nevertheless, they tried their best, having pride in their blood. Instead of being spoiled by their pedigree, they did what they could to prove excellence of the purebloods."
Sage indifferently spoke about their position in the Pureblood Party.
Ever since they first met, after seeing how the seventh squad seemed to have overcome struggles, Takeru thought that their story and circumstances would be similar.
It seemed like his hunch was spot on. The position of seventh squad was very similar to that of 35th platoon.

"We tried to make higher-ups learn of our existence and rise up. However, the higher-ups wouldn't admit it and didn't give us a decent position. They forced dark and dirty work on us, as we finished the missions successfully, instead of honour, only stigma has continued to pile up... the reason we haven't turned rotten, was thanks to a single comrade of ours."
Sage, stared at his own palm, then clenched his fist.
"Similarly to me... no, holding an even more unfortunate property there was a comrade, a girl called Ion Stewart. Her property's name is 'Pain'... she had an ancient property that allowed her to share her own pain with the others. She was always full of wounds that were characteristic to it and was despised by everyone. Contrary to that her personality was bright and positive... to the point you wouldn't think it possible for her to be in Pureblood Party."
Takeru guessed that the person Sage wants to save, is surely that girl.
"...during a mission, she remained alone in the outside world to allow her comrades escape. Caught by Inquisition, she has been moved to the Alchemist facility in order to experiment on her body, meanwhile we have returned to the inner world. We requested the higher-ups to let us go rescue her, but were rejected. '"That is the fate of those with dirty blood"... they said."
In the back of his eyes dwelled anger.
"The pureblood's pride is to protect the weak and lead them. And, to never forsake their brethren. West Side has neglected its pride and betrayed us. That is what motivated seventh squad to leave West Side and join the Heretic Alliance."
"....."
"In West Side as is now... we can't save our comrade."
After he finished speaking, Sage moved next to Takeru and sat down on the edge of the fence in the same way. Crossing his legs, Sage stared at Yuzuho.
Although Yuzuho had a complex expression, to break the silence she suddenly hit the floor of the roof with her spear.
She looked down on Takeru and Sage arrogantly.
And,
"——I am not a dropout!"
...that's the first thing she said.
Takeru stared at her, Sage snorted.
"...however, putting it together, it's true that sixth guard troop's position is weak among the Gods' Embers. I was originally from the first guard troop, but was impressed by the spirit of the sixth miko, Izayoi-sama, then vowed to protect her at the risk of my life."
While Takeru wasn't familiar with Gods' Embers circumstances, since they were a religious organization it was not surprising that they worshipped a miko.
Gods' Embers are one of the few non-authorized religious groups that have survived in the modern times. However, the internal works of it are complex

and they aren't monolithic. After the concept of religion was denied, the believers who sought salvation formed a faction. Out of the Inquisition's sight they started to worship a new God. Although it could be said a 'new God', it was the religions that have existed until now mixing together, so it would be better to call it unification of religions.
Inside of a huge organization that was born, there were different ideas on how to revere God and it didn't take long for it to divide.
In order to avoid conflict the pope has divided miko to serve gods, creating up factions.
According to Yuzuho's story, there was few believers of the sixth miko she served, that the faction was small and weak.
"You have all seen my subordinates. They are weak-willed and get swept away easily, they are getting nervous whenever something happens. Their only merit is their kindness. That is why someone as strict as me has to lead them. Even if it sounds arrogant."
It seemed like she was aware of her arrogance. Takeru felt it from the start, but the personality of hers now was somewhat forced.
For the sake of her comrades.
Yuzuho's mouth formed a '□' shape and she furrowed her eyebrows, then held the Rosario on her chest.
"It's been three years ever since Gods' Embers have succumbed to Inquisition. Inquisition negotiated with "If you hand over to us one of the miko, we will authorize Gods' Embers religious organization". The council and the pope decided on sacrificing the sixth miko unanimously...!"
The Rosario she held made a metallic sound.
"The sixth miko said nothing just accepting that decision, then she said to the believers seeking salvation not to mind it and serve the God in peace. We too, intended to do so."
However, Yuzuho added and grit her teeth.
"The rebellion against the higher-ups was inevitable. Not admitting that we have succumbed to Inquisition Gods' Embers believers carried out frequent terrorist attacks. They didn't follow the will of sixth miko at all. All they cared about was freedom of religion... they didn't try in the least to rescue Miko-sama who has become a sacrifice, not even a little...!"
Yuzuho wiped the tears in her eyes with her sleeve and looked up firmly.
"Miko-sama is trapped in the Alchemist's first research facility. That's why we came here. I know it's disgraceful to join the heretics even without you telling me that...! But, still...!"
Unable to endure the same any longer, she groaned loudly and turned around. Takeru couldn't understand religion, but he understood just how determined those girls were to come and ask Heretic Alliance for help.
They threw away shame and respectability... yet clinging to the thoughts of wanting to help they came here. There was no way Takeru could laugh at their resolve.

"Our philosophy and beliefs are different, they won't ever overlap. That might be true."
" "....." "
"But, the feelings of wanting to save someone precious to us——are the same."
Takeru stood up from the edge and clenched his fist.
"For fellow heretics, that's all we need to understand each other. After it's all over, we can might return to being enemies. But, when it happens, it happens. Right now, let's move forward at full force. Single-mindedly save those we want to save."
Extending his fist forward, Takeru said.
"——Alliance established. I will help you guys, so you too, lend me a hand."
The wind blew, from behind his swaying bangs Takeru directed his clear eyes towards the two.
Staring at the extended fist, Sage also stood up at the edge.
"Even if we end up facing each other as enemies... is it. I like these words. We will lend you a hand as well."
Sage extended his fist, matching Takeru's.
Then, in the end——
"...I won't acknowledge you. We've been only surrounded by enemies until now, so we're not going to believe you. The only ones we believe in is our God and the sixth miko."
Yuzuho who was turned away, turned back towards them.
"But, it's true that we want strength. We, the sixth guard troop decide to use you. That's why do your best and use us as well."
Arrogant until the very end, her mouth forming a '□', Yuzuho extended her fist in the same way the other two did.
Thus, the Heretic Alliance has started to act.
Not going hand in hand nor lend shoulder to each other. They bump their fists and go in the same direction.
In order to raise the signal fire of their respective counter-attack.

Chapter 3 - First Counter-Attack □□□

In the Alchemist's first research facility Suginami Suzaku, mesmerized looked at Kiseki inside of a water tank with her cheeks dyed red.
Seeing Hyakki Yakou completely controlled, Suzaku was enraptured by her own potential.
She felt a huge self-satisfaction from the feat of being able to control such powerful force.
——However, unexpectedly Suzaku made a wistful expression.
People of Suginami weren't interested nor satisfied by anything other than researching. They study, develop and after commercialization they lose interest in their experimental subjects. In other words, after getting the result they lose interest.
She didn't care where and on whom was the weapon used.
"...just this once... I am interested..."
With an ecstatic expression Suzaku touched the surface of the water tank.
"The world really is overflowing with strange things, isn't it... in particular, somewhere inside of this sample's soul there's a lot of information on mysterious immortality... it's the first time I want to see the results."
Without doubt the result will give her a new mystery.
There was still very, very much she didn't know about Hyakki Yakou.
Structurally its genes contained characteristics of countless fantastical organisms and it continued to evolve.
Infinitely evolving lump of growing meat. Chaos.
The meat's structure is something between magical power and organic matter, it's close to that of magical organisms summoned to this world.
They couldn't be controlled with Kiseki's will. Were they something like involuntary muscles? Maybe, the magical concept like curse is for fantastical organisms something genes are to humans?
When she showed Kiseki dreams of variety of situations, Hyakki Yakou made different reactions. When Suzaku gave her a stimulus the results exceeded her expectations every time.
Her euphoria raged endlessly. Her climax was infinite. Suzaku was burning up. The smell was similar to that of a human's blood, the appearance was shiny but on touch it was cold human skin.
...taste?
What is the taste I wonder. I wonder if there's a taste.
Breathing roughly Suzaku touched the barrier wrapping around Kiseki with her tongue and licked it.
".....as expected, that disgusts even me."
A voice has come from behind, with her tongue still extended Suzaku looked back in surprise.

Then, she met the line of sight of a man dressed like a priest.
"It has been a while, Haunted-san."
Suzaku blinked repeatedly and retracted her tongue.
"Really, you always appear from nowhere, don't you. I know you are semi-immortal, but I still don't understand the characteristics of your magical power's property."
"....."
"Oh, how about it? Won't you become my guinea pig? You might find a part of yourself you don't know of?"
Haunted moved towards Suzaku who was all excited and passed by her with a cold expression. Then he looked up at Kiseki in the water tank.
"On the surface Isuka-san was the same, but I really do hate Suginamis. Especially making up reasons for others to rely on them and satisfying their own greed for research."
"That can't be helped. That's the kind of beings Suginami are."
"As long as there are others depending on you, and your heart depends on it, right. I, who depend on myself and you who depends on the others are probably in conflict."
Hmph, Haunted snorted and squinted, starting at Kiseki's sleeping expression.
By his side, Suzaku stood lined up.
"To rather say, why have you come here? Currently Alchemist is in partnership with Inquisition, if I get in contact with people of Valhalla I shall be scolded by Sougetsu-sama."
Even though Suzaku asked, Haunted continued to stare in Kiseki's direction.
His gaze was nailed to sleeping Kiseki's happy smile.
"See, I've heard that you succeeded in controlling Hyakki Yakou. I came to take a look. I'm surprised. She really is stable. However... why is she so happy?"
When Haunted asked, Suzaku's eyes shone.
"She's dreaming right now. By continuously showing her happy dreams, Kiseki-sama's mind stabilizes, preventing Hyakki Yakou from going berserk."
When Suzaku happily spoke about her achievement, Haunted looked towards her for the first time.
His expression was grim.
"...what did you say?"
When he asked heavily in response, Suzaku joined her hands all smiley.
"Until now Kiseki-sama tasted only pain. That's why she is very weak against the thing called 'happiness'. Hyakki Yakou won't take actions Kiseki-sama doesn't want. As long as she sees happy dreams, it will stay quiet and won't overflow."

"What if it overflows? Inquisition regularly reduced amount of it contained inside by allowing it to release itself. If left untreated, it'll overflow even if this girl is happy."
"There's no problem. As long as she's stable it doesn't grow much, and because it's currently wartime we implant the diverging parts into soldiers. The amount is being reduced and it becomes a military force, that's killing two birds with one stone♪."
If that was true, it would turn into a huge amount of military strength. By implanting the indefinitely growing cells into humans, they would create nearly invincible soldiers.
If that was realized, they would create immortal puppets. By implanting the organisms they would increase soldiers strength by many times.
"We have already tested it. Just the other day in north America, Inquisition was invaded by magic side right? At the time we delivered several soldiers who had cells transplanted into them to intercept it. A report came saying that they annihilated a few thousands of enemies."
"....."
"Oh, I apologize for my rudeness. I have forgotten that you are of the magic side. My heartfelt condolences on this occurrence."
Suzaku lowered her head respectfully.
Her apologies didn't go through to Haunted. As if he couldn't care less about it, he looked up at Kiseki with his eyes wide open.
"In other words... this girl is being manipulated by being shown a dream."
"Yes. The reason erosion won't start even if a part is transplanted, is because she recognizes people as her dear brother. To Kiseki-sama her beloved older brother is more important than anything in this world, if he's in danger she automatically protects him, gives him power to survive and slaughter the enemy."
"....."
"Courageous little sister protecting her dear brother... if she protects him, her brother will pat her head. Being shown that kind of dream Kiseki-sama is happy and the Inquisition gets results in battle."
How is it how is it? Praise me, praise me?
Making an expression that said so, Suzaku peeked at Haunted.
"If possible I would like to provide this technology to Valhalla, but breaking the agreement with Inquisition would turn the brunt of their anger towards Alchemist. That's why, how do I say it, it would be really troublesome, thus it's impossible. ...I pray for your forgiveness."
For some reason she seemed like she would seriously cry at the moment and bowed regretfully. It was because she didn't care on whose forces it becomes as long as she could confirm the results, it seemed.
Denying Valhalla technology was fatal for them but...
Haunted suddenly smiled, changing his noh mask-like expression.
"No no, while it's true that we desperately want military power, criticism would spread in our side if such technology was to be brought in. Valhalla

doesn't have as roundabout ethics as Inquisition does. There's west, east, senate, lots of troublesome things——speaking frankly we don't want that kind of thing."
Although it was out of character for him, he emphasized on just the last words he said. His words weren't just bravado, all of the people who spoke with Haunted before knew he isn't the kind of person to do that. However, Suzaku didn't have a 'human heart' to realize that. Rather, she had no interest in 'human heart' in the first place.
She tilted her head, making an expression that 'then why are you here?'.
"I came here out of pure curiosity. I have seen Kiseki-san's power from a distance before. I was interested in the technology allowing to control this much power."
"Oh my!"
Being praised, Suzaku made a happy expression.
"As expected of you. I'm impressed. It's great technology. Very enlightening."
"Oh my oh my! Well well! Please don't praise me so much!"
She placed both her hands on her cheeks and twisted, wriggled around.
Haunted gentlemanly put a hand on his chest and bowed gratuitously.
"Today I have come in my spare time, but I am looking forward towards your success in the future. To celebrate our acquaintance and your domination of Hyakki Yakou, please take this."
And, still in a bow he held out his hand on top of which he concentrated magical power, it materialized as pitch black particles.

What showed in his hand was a bouquet of black flowers.
Suzaku received it with a sparkle in her eyes like one a child has when given a toy.
"Flower of DespairBelladone... it's a magical organism possible to summon with 'Despair' magical property, isn't it?"
"Since you seem to have an interest in my property, please use this sample. The limit is 24 hours, so it'd be best if you investigated it as soon as possible."
"Yaay! Thank you very much!"
With the bouquet in her hand Suzaku smiled like a little girl.
"Well then, see you again."
Haunted returned the smile and briskly left the location.
While walking down the hallway of the first research facility he directed his glaring pupils forward, his back stretched, his moves indicated he was angry.
"Are you going to go back like this? Is it fine to leave it like that?"
The S-class Magical Heritage he had by his waist Dáinsleif, Nacht sent her voice directly into Haunted's brain.
With an unusual grim expression on his face, he listened to Nacht's voice.
"...are you asking if it's fine as a member of Valhalla?"
"No, are you yourself fine with that? Is what I mean."
"....."
"You're super angry. At Hyakki Yakou's... or rather, that Kiseki girl's current state, right?"
After being told that, Haunted gently stroked the sword by his waist, the ' Dáinsleif'.
"You truly are the sword existing for my sake... I love you, partner."
"Stop that, really."
"You're so bashful."
"I'll slaughter you."
Haunted's expression was unchanged and grim, he continued to walk down the corridor.
Surprisingly quiet. Laughably quiet. He heard that first research facility's researchers were all people with surname Suginami.
It was too quiet. Even though there were people in, there were no presence of other persons.
"Ahh... how disgusting."
He snorted uncomfortably.
"Organisms living out their life locked up in the research facility. With outside world unbeknownst to them, dedicating their lives to research, not knowing emotions, pathetic dolls without knowledge of love. What an uninteresting bunch."
"Is that the reason you're angry?"
"Nope. I haven't the least interest of the Suginamis. I think they can do whatever by themselves."

□"....."□
"However, that lockout and exclusion, false happiness made with brainwashing and life clinging to it that was forced on that pitiful girl is something I cannot forgive."
Pitiful girl. Kusanagi Kiseki.
Miserable, a girl carrying miserable fate. She tasted the worst pain possible... a very small girl. A pure girl that knows nothing.
Right now she was in the middle of happiness. In the middle of false happiness.
"Making up and submerging her in a lukewarm dream and false happiness, I conclude that Suginami is evil. A dream? An illusion making people happy? Downright absurd. It's the same with despair. Nacht, did Kusanagi Kiseki look happy to you?"
□"Nyaw. She looked comical to me. I thought she turned really pitiful for a while now."□
"I don't like it. I don't like that at all...! Such a charming girl, a girl my type being used by Suginami is something I absolutely can't forgive!"
Haunted sped up his pace as he walked through the research facility full of puppets.
His expression was full of determination. There was a honest resolve.
As if he was a hero saving a heroine.
Like a messenger of justice, that kind of expression.
Looking from a perspective of others, they would call him 'evil' without any hesitation despite the fact he himself rejected evil.
However, even inside of him existed the concept of good and evil. For example looking from someone else's perspective if his 'good' is thought of as 'evil', for himself it is doubtlessly 'good'.
Right now, he rose to action in order to conform to his own justice.
"I already made my move. I'll save that girl. I'll save her from the false happiness and——"
And without losing his way, he moved straight forward.
"——I'll definitely return her back to the reality devoid of salvation!"
The path of despair's poster boy was single-minded and straightforward.

□□□

Takeru gathered the captains from the teams raiding first research facility and managed to firmly unify them to function as alliance before returning to the student council room.
He walked through the school... or rather, the building that mimicked one and passed by various people.
They didn't seem to be students of AntiMagic Academy, but he passed by several people wearing Inquisition's uniforms. Other than that there were people wearing white lab coats, who were probably Alchemist's

researchers. People in suits wearing badge of Ethics Committee, members of religious groups other than Gods' Embers', as well as a number of witches from both East and West.
"...it seems like South America's shelter has attacked North America's Inquisition but were intercepted and withdrew."
"The Dragoon's development is flourishing over there and topographically it's suitable for defence, but South America's shelter should have a higher population. Also, there's mainly Magic Academy West Side there right? They should have been prepared for invasion, for them to be wiped out in just 3 days..."
"No clue. I can't believe that place's West Side would lose... it might be a new weapon. Is Inquisition really on defensive? Unlike magic side who uses transfer magic, their means of invasion is probably limited, right?"
"If you raise up over ten thousand metres you won't be damage by Invisible DisasterAkashic Hazard and the protective field isn't invincible. Recently Inquisition was frequently cooperating with the overseas in secret. They must have anticipated war breaking out. I'm guessing that invasion is a matter of time."
Talking in the hallway was a female Inquisitor and a man who looked like East Side's sorcerer. Judging by what they were talking about, war has already started outside.
After Pureblood Party has invaded old Japan, Valhalla... magic side didn't pull back.
Although he expected it, realizing that the second Witch Hunt War has begun his mood has become terribly heavy.
There was no way he wouldn't be feeling guilty for doing things for himself in such circumstances.
But he had to do it. He had no idea on war or politics, but Takeru and the others could only think about one battle at a time.
With that said, they could only leave it to Nagaru and the higher-ups.
"....."
His thoughts were disordered, but the Heretic Alliance would lend him their strength.
Right now, he could only proceed forward.
I wonder... where did Kanaria go?
He couldn't find her by searching blindly.
Now that he was looking for her like this, Takeru realized that he knew nothing about her. They fought together in the Magic Academy and were able to experience student life together, albeit short. He knew her feelings towards Ikaruga and Isuka, hatred towards Alchemist and crossed blades with her.
But that was all. What did she feel when she met Ikaruga, what has she decided to do, Takeru didn't know. They might not understand each other despite meeting. He though that Ikaruga's and Kanaria's problem was something he shouldn't try to put in words.

"...Kusanagi?"
While he walked down the hallway indulging in thoughts, a voice has called from the front. Takeru looked up.
It was Ikaruga. Her expression wasn't bright at all.
"...were you looking for me?"
Her usual sleepy-looking eyes were directed towards Takeru and she tilted her head.
"Did you find Kanaria?"
".....yes."
Hearing her dispirited response and seeing that Kanaria wasn't with her, he could imagine to an extent what kind of conversation did they have when Ikaruga chased her.
He could more or less tell what Ikaruga said to Kanaria.
"It's... not okay, is it. Aren't you overburdening yourself?"
"....."
"...you might not like it, but maybe I should tell her off."
Takeru smiled awkwardly and put a hand on Ikaruga's shoulder.
With a dumbfounded expression, Ikaruga stared at him.
Surely, Ikaruga didn't want Kanaria to go on with her revenge. No, it wasn't that she didn't want her to take revenge, but didn't want her to get in danger. Attack on the Alchemist involves a lot of danger. Regardless of her awareness as a mother, Ikaruga didn't want an important to her existence Kanaria was to be involved in something dangerous.
He didn't think Kanaria would obediently do what she was told to, but as her senior pupil he could point out her immaturity not through words, but through sword.
Of course, he didn't want to do it.
"Kusanagi."
Ikaruga called Takeru. Nn? He responded, but that moment.
——His arm was grabbed onto and he was immediately dragged into a room right beside them that looked like a data room.
"He?!"
As soon as she dragged Takeru in, Ikaruga closed the room's door and pushed him down.
On top of Takeru who fell on his back, she has also fell.
There was no pain, but his body turned stiff from surprise. Because he hit the shelf as he fell, documents have floated down like flower petals.
Takeru's heartbeat increased and he tried to remove Ikaruga from on top of his chest.
"——Embrace me."
Hearing that phrase all of a sudden, he was unable to speak up.
"...you said I'm overburdening myself. That's why, embrace me."
One-sidedly Ikaruga requested that of him and buried her face in his chest.
Wondering if something happened, Takeru was discouraged.
It was because Ikaruga's shoulders were shaking.

"...I'm scared... it's so scary I can't bear it."
"....."
"Just the thought that I can lose her again.... trembling won't stop, it's unbearable."
Her body trembled finely and she tightly grabbed onto Takeru's clothes.
"It's stupid, right... what, why am I trying to act like a mother here. We've been together for about two days and yet... I just created her and did nothing else... why am I so scared thinking of losing her I wonder... it's laughable... there's limits to being a hypocrite."
"....."
"I turned horrible... when I'm in front of her I can't find decent wording. I think and think... but words of apology won't come out. I know it's unforgivable, I know begging for forgiveness would be cowardly... but I can only think of apologizing."
"....."
"I... I didn't think I was this weak..."
She grasped his clothes more strongly.
"....."
In silence, Takeru strongly hugged Ikaruga's body. Strong enough to break her, passionately and preciously he hugged her.
Ikaruga too, has moved her arms behind his back and hugged Takeru, as if entrusting all of herself to him.
Although Ikaruga might have been angry, Takeru was happy. Ikaruga who said that she won't let anyone carry her burden was relying on him like this, he was incredibly happy about it.
"Suginami."
"...it's fine for it to be just now, call me by my first name... I hate that surname."
"...Ikaruga."
Takeru said her name as if whispering into her ear.
"Even if you don't acknowledge it, even if Kanaria doesn't acknowledge it, you are her mother."
"...there's no way that's true...!"
"No, you're her mother. After all, you haven't forgotten about her even for a moment, have you? Same for Isuka. You've always kept them in your thoughts."
"....."
"You lost Kanaria once and was hurt. You realized that you did something terrible and left to the outside world. And since then, you've been always living while burdened with what happened to Kanaria. I've been beside you the entire time... I've been watching you the entire time... I knew that you are living while burdened by many things."
He raised the hand he had behind her back to Ikaruga's head.
Then gently he stroked her head, as if combing her hair.

"That's why you are her mother. No matter what anyone says, you're her mother. Being afraid of losing her and wanting to protect her is natural."
"……nn."
"That's not weakness. It's the proof that you're Kanaria's mother."
I won't tell you to be proud of it.
But stop calling yourself hypocrite. Stop denying yourself any more than this.
Accept it. No matter how pretentious those emotions are, even if you are told you're flimsy, even if you don't believe in yourself, follow your own feelings.
With that alone, it'll become easy. With that alone, you'll become strong.
After all, you're a mother. Protecting a child is a mother's instinct.
Saying so, Takeru continued to pat Ikaruga's head.
She entrusted herself to Takeru's words and warmth.
After they hugged each other for about 30 minutes, Ikaruga's trembling finally stopped.
"...if that girl is to fight... then I'll fight. If she wants revenge, then I'll carry it instead... her suffering, hatred, anything that threatens her life..."
"That's heavy. Give me half."
When Ikaruga resolved herself, Takeru said so as if it was a matter of course.
Then, she moved away her face from his chest and stared at him with upturned eyes and her usual sleepy expression.

".....hey, what do you mean by that?"
"Just like I said. I won't let you carry it alone. I'll help you."
"You're going to carry half of my burden as a mother?"
...mm? Wait a second. Thinking about it deeply, that's.
Quite calm, Takeru exerted his thoughts.
"Does that mean... you'll be her father?"
Too late he noticed he said something really critical.
"Can I take that as a proposal?"
Takeru panicked——not. Ikaruga's expression was seriousness itself.
Making fun of it or covering it up with laughter was impossible.
She didn't say it lightly. Whether Kanaria acknowledged her was a different problem from this. It was the truth that he wanted to carry Ikaruga's burden. He wanted to do something for her. It's been always like this.
And this was the first time Ikaruga was willing to rely on him.
He felt happy about it and if there was no obstacles, he wanted to do it.
But told he proposed, he was able to assert it wasn't that.
It was clear what he should affirm and what should he deny.
...somehow, I feel that since coming here I'm not doing well enough.
Albeit it was different from being indecisive, it probably looked like that to Ikaruga. Sadly.
Just when Takeru was about to answer Ikaruga's question.
Ikaruga squirmed on top of him then moved her face right in front of Takeru's.
And she touched his forehead with hers.
"...it's a joke. I wouldn't think of using such underhanded method to monopolize you, don't worry."
Ikaruga spoke quietly at a distance their breath reached each other.
A scent of mint tickled his nose.
"I intend to think about your feelings. But can I say one thing?"
"...y-yeah."
"Don't go raising people's hopes like that. Think more of woman's emotions. Were it someone else than me, she'd end up disappointed after having expectations, you know?"
She meant he lacked self-awareness.
Rather, raising hopes? Does that mean Ikaruga really——
"Say you're going to bear my burden again and I"ll receive it just like that, prepare yourself."
Ikaruga raised her body and moved away from Takeru.
Just like that she headed for the entrance of the data room. Takeru raised his upper body.
As she put a hand on the doorknob, Ikaruga made a refreshed smile and looked back just once.
"I won't say 'bye bye' again... don't make that face."
"...Ikaruga, I..."

"I'll do what I can to protect Kanaria. That's why, you too do what you can for your own sake."
"....."
"It's okay. I'll tell you when I need help and I'll always be there to help you. Don't worry."
She opened the doors and light from the corridor has entered the data room.
"Also, thank you. It was a great help, Takeru."
After saying so, Ikaruga left the data room.
Left alone, Takeru looked upwards again.
While staring at the ceiling he organized everything in his head. He could understand Ikaruga's feelings of not wanting Kanaria to fight. Although he shouldn't be one to talk, with a personality that makes go headlong into danger Kanaria might lose her life. For Takeru too, it was the first time he plunged into such a large-scale battle. Same for Kanaria. While there was a lot to do in this time's operation, he wasn't alone, the platoon wasn't alone. There were many people to rely on.
He really might not be able to save everything.
Stretching his hand towards the ceiling, he clenched a fist.
He felt like the thing he wasn't able to grasp was this time right in front of him.
"No matter what, I will... we will... save everything."
Once again with determination filling his chest, Takeru stood up with anticipation of what's ahead.

Kanaria sat down under a tree in the corner of the school yard and stared at Lævateinn that pierced the ground.
The words of Ikaruga who was with her earlier were simmering in the corner of her head.
Her joyous feelings of finally being able to attack the Alchemist had a nail stabbed in by Ikaruga, who should have been also a participant.
"What will you do about attacking Alchemist? Isuka won't come back any more... I think she would like you to live."
"Mama is no longer here. That's why I'll destroy Alchemist. I'll crush it all, giving Mama a funeral."
"...and how long will it continue? After destroying first research facility, what's next? Third? And if that's over, you'll crush Inquisition? Or maybe kill the guy who killed Isuka? Are you going to spend your entire life just for that? Do you really think Isuka would have wanted that?"
"——Shut up!! I told you it has nothing to do with you! I said you can stay beside me if you want, but I didn't let you order me around!"
"....."
"If you think of Mama even a little, you would do the same as Kana! And yet, you tell me to leave Alchemist alone and leave for myself! There's no way I can do that!"

"Before Isuka died... she relayed to me that she wants you to live. I have... a responsibility to protect your life. The one she protected, you, I will——"
When she said 'responsibility', the ends of Kanaria's hair stood up.
"Don't screw around! Don't try acting like my mother! What responsibility?! The only responsibility you have is to atone for deserting Mama and escaping alone! To do that, there's no other way but to destroy everyone who made Mama suffer!"
"……nhh."
"If you can't do that then shut up! Hold your knees and stay here doing nothing, all alone!"
"Kanaria, I want to——"
"Don't call my name! It's the name given to me by Mama!"
Ikaruga's expression when she said that wouldn't leave Kanaria's head.
Without saying anything, Ikaruga accepted Kanaria's words and faced down, hurt. The one that was unable to bear it and escaped from the spot was Kanaria.
In front of Ikaruga she couldn't maintain her calm no matter what. Every word Ikaruga said upset her feelings.
"...nhh... why does the woman who wasn't here... understand Mama's feelings...!"
She entrusted her back to the tree and sitting, she faced her own knees. Frustrated, she couldn't raise her face. Ikaruga told her the same thing Isuka did. The fact that the person who wasn't there knew feelings of her beloved mother better than anyone else frustrated her.
And she was frustrated because she couldn't stop her revenge despite knowing that.
She's been boasting of giving her mother a funeral and yet she was unable to stop it knowing that her mother didn't want it, it meant that there was no justification for her revenge.
There was only her hatred. Only her helpless feelings existed for this revenge.
"But... still, to Kana it's...!"
Allowing the root of evil that was the Alchemist was——
"Unforgivable...!"
She stared at Lævateinn with her golden hatred-stained eyes.
Lævateinn wouldn't respond to her request no matter what.
The blade was piling on rust every day.
But she didn't care about that.
She won't rely on the sword. With the skills she has polished she'll annihilate her hateful enemies and have her revenge.
No matter how long it takes... even if she has to dedicate her entire life to revenge.
Even if her mother doesn't wish for it.
"Kana... absolutely won't forgive it!"
Kanaria shook off her hesitation, pulled out the sword and stood up.

To advance on the road of carnage without any hesitation.

"——Well then, let's start the strategy meeting."
Two days later, three teams have gathered in the student council room and sat down on the lined-up chairs in front of a projector, doing a strategy meeting. Somehow, it reminded Takeru of the cultural festival's strategy meeting. Back then they partnered-up with other platoons and discussed on what to do for the festival.
Of course, while the situation was similar, the tension was different though. They weren't the main force responsible for diversion, Takeru and the others were a detached force.
'God's Embers' Sixth Miko's Guard Troop, six people.
'Pureblood Party's' Seventh Squad, six people.
'AntiMagic Academy's' 35th Test Platoon, six people.
Total of eighteen people is going to rescue 'Hyakki Yakou' Kusanagi Kiseki, 'Ancient Wizard' Ion Stewart and the 'Sixth Miko' Izayoi.
"The amount of personnel in the main force responsible for diversion is just two hundred people. Included in that there's fifty Dragoons and manned Magical Dragoons."
"The numbers make me anxious, but fifty Dragoons and Magical Dragoons... you really did well to gather so many."
When Ouka showed her surprise, Nagaru pat her shoulders with the pointing stick and laughed care-freely.
"I've told you that before, but it's quite an old organization□. Alchemist's and Inquisition's SmithsRegins and alchemists developed them in jointly. Because these machines specialize in speed and defence, I think we'll be able to drag out Alchemist's newest machines out to the frontlines."
Nagaru continued the meeting.
"These forces are going to attack from the front. However, those two hundreds aren't going to enter the building. Until the end they are going to act disruptive and focus on buying time so don't expect any assistance."
She pointed with the stick at at the satellite photo of the first research facility that was projected.
While it was nearly impossible to take a photo of the Sanctuary's interior because of terrible magnetic field disturbance, it was possible to take pictures of uncontaminated land. Although, since it was unlikely Heretic Alliance had their own satellite, this photo must have been made with one 'borrowed' from Inquisition.
"You, as the detached force are going to enter the facility from the mountains on the opposite side to the one main force is attacking."
"...even if the diversion goes well, it's hard to believe the backside is going to become lax, right? From what it looks like it looks more like a coniferous forest than a mountain. It'd be natural to believe its a trap."
Sage put a hand on his chin and advised Nagaru.

"Naw worries. We have an expert responsible for scouting and covering you with sniping."
After Nagaru said so, unexpectedly a woman has come out from behind the projector. Ouka raised an "ah" in surprise.
"...so she was in Heretic Alliance."
Kanaria also recalled her and seemed surprised. The woman showed her face and shook her hand lightly in Ouka's and Kanaria's directions.
"Oonogi Kanata-san. She's an ex-EXE member. She's going to cover you alone until you invade the building."
With a grin, Kanata lightly greeted everyone.
"By the way, she may not look like it, but she's nearly thirt——"
From beside Nagaru, Kanata hit her with an elbow.
"Oonogi Kanata, 22 years old. Please leave scouting and cover fire to me during the operation, take care of me everyone."
With a stern look Kanata made Inquisition's salute.
Other than in the Small Fry Platoon, there weren't many reactions.
"Hmm... are you going to cover us all alone until we go down the mountain? From what I see, it doesn't seem reliable. Shall we take care of the traps and cameras instead?"
Yuzuho said so while sitting arrogantly on the chair.
Kanata thinly smiled to her.
"With my skills and Relic Eater, I'd make it easy for you to stroll in even if we invaded Inquisition's headquarters."
"...that's some confidence. Relic Eater? If I'm not wrong that's a sham Magical Heritage owned by Inquisition. I can't trust it. There's a possibility of it acting like a spy."
When gazes full of suspicion have focused on Kanata, Nagaru moved in front.
"There's no need to worry about that. First, Inquisition cannot control it in this world, and her Relic Eater 'Nobunaga' has been coated with a special material existing only in this world. That's why Ootori Sougetsu shouldn't be able to control it."
After saying so re-assuredly, Nagaru went back to explaining the strategy. If what she said was true, same treatment could be applied to Ouka's Vlad.
"A substance that only exists in this world huh... I wonder just how many years of processing technology development it took."
Ikaruga muttered next to Takeru. Although she seemed calm, she was unable to suppress her curiosity as a technician and continued to fidget on the chair.
"You will run down the mountain with assistance of Kanata-san and then break into the first research facility. Kanata-san's sniping gets more powerful the bigger the distance she snipes from, but if it's too powerful there's a possibility of you getting swallowed by it. That's why to offer precise assistance after entering I want one person in charge of sniping in each team. The person in charge of sniping will take distance from the

vanguard and chase them while taking down the enemies left behind by Kanata-san. They absolutely cannot stray and cannot neglect cooperation."
In that case, that would make Usagi act as the rearguard member of the 35th Test Platoon. She seemed a little anxious, but when she noticed Takeru's gaze she made a serious expression and nodded strongly.
"The problem starts there. The objective is here... the girl from the seventh squad and Sixth Miko-san are in the L5 - E57 and L5 F37 labs researching ancient properties. The detached force other than 35th Platoon and the snipers in charge are to invade here and immediately secure the rescue subject."
Then, Nagaru pointed at the centre of the research facility.
"——The central L6 - XXX. The 35th Test Platoon has to reach there alone. The defences in the centre should be very strong so I want seventh squad's and sixth guard's as well as Usagi-chan to back the platoon up. After making sure the penetration has succeeded, take refuge on the hill Kanata-san captured and concentrate on protecting yourself until rescue operation is complete. You will be alone, but Kanata-san will definitely protect you three□."
Usagi looked sideways towards the snipers in charge from other teams. There was a sunglasses-wearing member of Pureblood Party and a girl from Gods' Embers who seemed timid and exchanged looks with her.
Nagaru exhaled and put both her hands on the desk.
"Each of you will have to deal with the enemy forces on your own after entering. Cram the building's structure into your head. In particular, the building 35th platoon is invading is Alchemist's most important secret so a considerable resistance is expected."
After saying so with a meek expression, Nagaru smiled as she usually did. But, it seemed slightly weaker than usual.
"...this is all I can give you all. If possible I would like to plan it better and provide more forces, but there's no time. We need to perform the operation in a rush. It's all our fault for not being internally prepared. Forgive me."
No one blamed Nagaru who made a wry smile.
It was more than enough. They weren't alone. They had compatriots they could rely on. They, who fought all alone until now knew just how good treatment was that, everyone understood it.
There were so many comrades with the same goal. There weren't many things more reliable than that.
"If possible, come back alive everyone. After you rescue the VIP's, everyone withdraw. Use transfer magic charms and come back here."
"——Wait, it's over right after the rescue?"
That's when Kanaria suddenly stood up and glared at Nagaru.
Nagaru tilted her head and nodded.
"The objective of this operation is rescue after all□. If possible avoid fighting, let non-combatants withdraw without killing them. Suppression of the first research facility is not an objective."

"...Nagaru said it. Heretic Alliance's enemy is Suginami Suzaku. She's in first research facility!"
Kanaria's anger by itself raised the temperature in the student council room.
"If we don't kill her, it'll repeat itself again...! We can't not kill her here!"
When Takeru reached out to try to stop Kanaria, Nagaru opened her mouth.
"I know. But, I'm sorry. I can't heed that request."
"W-why! That's why Kana came here!"
"The operation this time is a rescue one. To kill Suginami Suzaku we need a much larger forces. That person probably isn't as simple and fragile as you think."
"Then prepare more!"
"Impossible. Carrying out an assassination at the same time and adding unnecessary sacrifices is something I can't do. Capturing her is talk of the more distant future."
Until the end calmly, soothingly, Nagaru told Kanaria so.
Kanaria's shoulders shook, she clenched her fist and grit her teeth.
It didn't look like she really understood it. As the captain, in order not to add on to discord during the strategy meeting Takeru tried to force Kanaria to sit down.
".....I get it... fine."
But Kanaria relaxed her shoulders, turned around on her heel and left the student council room.
Takeru tried to call her back, but Ikaruga grasped his hand.
"...there's no need to chase after her. It's okay... I already made my move. I'll explain it to you later."
While facing forward, Ikaruga put more strength into hand holding him.
Being told that, he couldn't help but obey it. When Takeru sat down on the chair again in silence, Nagaru winked towards him for some reason.
"All right, all of you, you're to gather and establish cooperation between each other in preparation for tomorrow. The operation starts at 8 pm. We should arrive on the other side with transfer magic at about 3 o'clock."
Nagaru clapped her hands and the room's lights have turned on.
Takeru was bothered about Kanaria, but he gathered other teams and started the preparations.

Chapter 4 - I Dream of Destruction

Kusanagi Kiseki saw a dream in which her happiness collapsed right in front of her.
Having pointed out that her happiness is false, she was intimidated by a person she didn't know and forced to wake up.
When she opened her eyes like she was told to, what she saw was darkness and suffering.
Her real self was drowning in the darkness, repeatedly dying. Even when she cried for help, no one came. On the other side of the glass there were just people staring at her with interest and a sparkle in their eyes.
Again and again, she continued to die all alone.
That's the kind of dream it was.
"——Kiseki? Did something happen?"
Kiseki who was spending the afternoon on a café's terrace suddenly looked up after being called by her name.
"You okay? You were spacing out."
Peeking into her face on the terrace that was lit up by by sunlight filtered with foliage was her lover, Kusanagi Takeru.
She stared at Takeru absent-mindedly for about ten seconds. Not seeing too big a reaction he smiled wryly and scratched his cheek with a finger.
"Drool, it's dripping.'
"...aa...aauu..."
Kiseki hurriedly wiped her face with a napkin and shyly faced downwards.
"Well, you must've read a book until late, haven't you. We finally get to go out to town together, don't go sleeping on me□."
"S-sorry. This filtered sunlight was too pleasant and I slept for a moment there... ehehe. Really, s-sorry, okay? I'm sorry."
Apologizing many times, Kiseki rubbed her nose with a finger.
Takeru smiled kindly, said "it's fine" and raised the cup with coffee to his mouth.
Dazedly, he looked up at the light above.
That's right. Today's the day of the date. She had her favourite dress and a straw hat, she properly had a make-up on and was out on a date after a while with the person she loved. Just earlier she ate lunch and now was in the middle of enjoying a cup of tea in their favourite café. Relieved, Kiseki raised the tea cup with chamomile tea up to her mouth. Probably because there was honey in, it was faintly sweet.
"...just earlier, I saw a scary dream."
"Hee□, what kind of dream was it?"
"A dream where I died all alone. Onii-chan wasn't there... a dream of being killed time and time again in a dark place."

Hearing the contents of the disturbing dream, Takeru almost spat out coffee he had in his mouth.
"H-hey hey... what's that, you saw that kind of dream in at time like now?"
"...yup. I was really scared."
As Kiseki was still feeling uneasy, Takeru pat her head that she leaned in his direction.
"It's okay. Nii-chan is always with you and you are always with me. I won't leave you to be alone."
"...you're right... I wonder what was that... how strange."
Squirming, Kiseki looked away from Takeru.
"...can it be, are you anxious about us living together just the two of us? You're not relying on Nii-chan at all. I don't earn that much, so you might get uneasy about our future."
"Eh?!! N-no, that's not itt. It's not unease. Kiseki is always, always happy. Really happy."
When she tried to resolve the misunderstanding flustered, Takeru made a blank expression just for a moment and then laughed embarrassed.
"I-I see. Being told that... makes me really happy as your husband. We'll continue to struggle in the future... but I'll do my best for your sake."
After saying so with a serious expression, Takeru stared at her.
...that's right. Kiseki and Onii-chan got married.
It wasn't that she forgot it, but because of that dream she doubted the happiness in front of her for a moment.
...we married... and... yesterday... we...
Recalling what happened last night, Kiseki's face was stained with bright red.
Awa-awawawawa! That's right, that's how it was□! Yesterday, Kiseki finally did it with Onii-chan□□□!
She remember anything and everything that happened. It was very embarrassing. But while it was embarrassing, it was without a doubt the happiest moment in her life.
That's right. Today was the day they were looking for a room to live in as a married couple.
Blushing, she continued to glance at Takeru's face.
He smiled broadly towards her.
Her embarrassment disappeared and peacefulness rose from the back of her chest, she squinted.

——Aaah, I feel so happy.

Feeling such joy, she would immediately forget the scary dream from earlier. With just her Onii-chan being there, Kiseki is happy.
In this world, nothing stood in the way of her happiness. In an empty town, in a world with nobody in it, they live alone just the two of them. It was only to her and her Onii-chan's world.

It was a matter of fact, natural for it to be this way. Joyous world.
Overflowing with happiness, perfect world.
Continuing endlessly, everlasting world——
"Even though you noticed already, that this world is all lies."
——The voice, came from right in front of her.
Kiseki who was immersing in happiness promptly looked up.
In there... Takeru who should have been disappeared and someone she didn't know was sitting in the chair.
"...eh..."
Her thinking stopped, she couldn't accept the fact that Takeru disappeared.
The person in front had long hair hanging down and while facing in Kiseki's direction, downcast her eyes. A girl wearing white movement restricting clothes. Her long hair was worn out, her body was full of bruises. Her skin colour was pale, it was drained of blood.
A person Kiseki didn't know——no, wrong.
She actually knew. She knew who was the girl in front of her.
"You noticed, right? That this world is a lie."
The worn-out girl said so in a hoarse voice while facing down.
"...who are...you?"
"Kusanagi Kiseki."
".....?"
"I am you. Your real self. Yourself, who continues to die endlessly in the darkness."
The girl raised her face. In her pupils there was hatred towards everything in this world.
"This world is a dream given to you by others. In other words, your current happiness is all a lie."
"...w-why are you lying like that? I mean, Onii-chan and Kiseki are——"
"Your real Onii-chan is in the world outside. He's not by your side."
Every time the girl spoke a word, Kiseki's heart stirred. She didn't accept it.
However, this girl overlapped with the dream she has seen earlier.
"T-there's no way! Kiseki and Onii-chan are in love and married!"
"True, in this world, that is. After all, this world was made so for your convenience."
"No!! Kiseki is——"
"——This is how your reality."
The moment Kiseki raised her voice, a wave of red meat overflowed from the girl's feet.
The wave of meat swallowed the café's terrace, swallowed the city and continued to swallow the world.
"...hiii..."
Kiseki placed a hand on her mouth, the chair she was sitting in fell as she stood up.
At the same time, the world darkened.

Leaving just Kiseki and the girl in front of her, everything was swallowed by darkness.
Seeing everything disappear, Kiseki panicked, she tensed and trembled.
"Oh, pitiful me... not noticing that others are using your real body as they please, convinced that a false dream is happiness... miserable me."
"I...it's not a lie...Kiseki and Onii-chan love each other... Onii-chan was always by Kiseki's side..."
With tears pooling in her eyes, she denied the girl's words.
And, as if searching for her loved one, Kiseki wandered in the darkness.
"...Onii-chan? Where are you? Where did you go?"
Suddenly, a light was lit in the darkness.
In the middle of the light, there was her brother. However, surrounding him there was a lot of people. Laughing with everyone, her brother ignored Kiseki.
Walking next to her brother, was a beautiful girl with sunset-coloured hair.
"Onii…-chan?"
"That's right. That's your real Onii-chan. And this——is the real me."
The girl's voice came from behind.
When she looked behind, there was a crucified girl, with tubes connected to her body through which her blood was drained.
With a sea of flesh overflowing from her, the girl in the middle cried tears of blood and faced in her direction.
The memories that shouldn't have been there, flashed through her mind.
Memories of endless suffering and death... it was the same as her dream.
"Your favourite one piece dress and straw hat... favourite café and chamomile tea... always the same date being repeated. It's natural. After all, that's all you know. You have seen the outside world just once, right?"
"No... no no no!"
"There's no way siblings can get married. There's a lot of evidence confirming that this world is a dream of yours."
"Shut up, shut up... Kiseki is always happy... she's always together with Onii-chan...!"
"Did you forget, that your Onii-chan has betrayed you?"
The girl stretched her hand and touched Kiseki's cheek.
That incredibly cold hand reminded her of the moment she let go of her brother's hand.
Her brother who vowed to die together with her, letting go of his sword when the time has come... that memory.
Kiseki got down on her knees and held her head, cowering.
"...why are you showing me such a thing...?!"
"I'm just showing you reality."
"Why are you trying to destroy Kiseki's happiness?! I don't care about reality any more! Even if this is a dream, Kiseki is happy enough with it!"
The girl closed on Kiseki who tried to close herself in a shell and hugged her gently.

And, her cold lips trembled by Kiseki's ear.
"Are you really okay with that? Even if Onii-chan will forget all about you and have fun with his comrades while you continue to remain in this fake happiness?"
"…….uuu…"
"…will you forgive Onii-chan for being happy?"
No matter how she plugged her ears, the girl's voice reached Kiseki's soul.
Even her, who never knew happiness, actually realized that this world is strange right from the very beginning.
Still, she was much happier here than in the full of suffering world outside.
Even if it was fake, being always together with Onii-chan made her happy.
And yet, her other self sleeping in the depths of her heart whispered into her ear, speaking of reality.
"It's okay to be honest with yourself… you can't forgive it, can you…? Even though he betrayed you he enjoys genuine happiness, it really can't be forgiven, right?"
"……."
"What you desire isn't something like a fake dream. What do you really want?"
Suddenly, a scream resounded in the darkness.
When she raised her head, she saw the red meat assault someone. It was the people she met before when she fled the deepest prison, it were people from the 35th Test Platoon.
The tentacles caught escaping girls. They wound around their bodies and forcefully squeezed, causing the girls to easily fall apart.
As if to say it wasn't enough, the tentacles continued to hit the scattered, dead flesh.
The girl with sunset-coloured hair was being given attention for a longer time, making it a ghastly sight. The beautiful sunset-coloured hair was stained with blood and her organs, dirtied.
"Stopp! Why would you do such a thing…?!"
"Because this is your heartfelt desire."
"Noo… Kiseki doesn't want this——"
Kiseki looked at her own feet and was astonished. Realizing that the red meat tormenting the girls overflowed from her body, her face cramped up and she screamed.
"Why are you rejecting it? These little ones are a part of you. They just fulfil your desires. You can't control them, but aren't they only doing what you want?"
"…….no."
"It's fine to be honest with yourself… your goal's been already decided on, isn't all that's left is to proceed towards it? Won't you be happy if you do so?"
"Goal… you say this is Kiseki's goal? Killing people important to Onii-chan, is Kiseki's goal?"

Kiseki denied it. She desperately tried to think it to be a lie.
"Look... your happiness is right there."
In the direction the girl pointed to, Kiseki saw it.
There, was her brother walking towards her in the form of a demon. He directed his anger and murderous intent as well as hate towards Kiseki.
There was her Kusanagi Takeru's figure holding a sword in one hand and moving closer.
Her brother glared at Kiseki. After having his comrades killed, he no longer thought of Kiseki as of someone to protect, but someone to kill.
Taking God Hunter form, Takeru emitted flames of destruction in order to kill Kiseki.
"....."
——I'll kill you.
"....."
——I won't forgive you. I'll definitely kill you.
Thinking of these words in her mind, Kiseki has,
"..... !!"
Started to shed tears without end.
When Takeru approached her with murderous intent, something has tightened in the depths of her heart.
Something she has never tasted until now has filled her chest.
Being a target of various negative emotions, Kiseki,

Kiseki——has noticed that she was at ease.

"...look... see? If you do so, at last Onii-chan will look only at you. At last, he will make you happy."
"...that's.. it's a lie...."
"Now, open your eyes——what do you need to do to become happy?"
The girl's cold cheek wiped off Kiseki's tears.
"...it's a lie... Kiseki doing... such..."
"It's not a lie. After all, the proof is... look."
The girl pointed beneath crouching Kiseki.
It was the puddle of blood flowing from the girl with sunset-coloured hair she killed a moment ago.
Seeing that, her expression changed——into a smiling one.
"....."
——Ah, aahhh...
uuuaaaaAaaAAAAAaAaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaAAAAAAaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!"
Kiseki screamed. Even if she tried to erase it, the smile wouldn't disappear.
She was too happy.

No matter how much she tried to deny it, the reality in front of her wouldn't change. That killing people important to her brother and having him only look at her would make her so——
——Make her so joyous.
"....."
After crying for a while, she was exhausted.
Her wet with tears face was still smiling, she was tired of opposing her own desires.
That's right. That's how it was. Her happiness in the real world, was to be killed by her brother and having him die together with her.
The result wasn't as she wanted it.
Her brother was distracted by people other than herself and hesitated to die.
Kiseki despised her brother. But, she thought it can't be helped. Since he lived in the outside world, it wasn't strange for him to find one or two things important to him.
It wasn't that there was someone else more important to him than she was.
Ever since she was in the deepest prison, her brother spoke of the existence of 'comrades', she already knew of their existence for a long time.
She knew even that there's someone he might be in love with.
That's why she was anxious about the possibility.
That there might be someone more important to him than she was.
"Ahh... I see..."
But, that wasn't the problem. She noticed it too late.
Why couldn't he kill her. Why wouldn't he die together with her.
It wasn't that her brother didn't kill himself because he valued his life.
It wasn't because there were other people important to him. It was just one of many reasons.
The main reason was——
"Kiseki... didn't do her best..."
Because she left all of it to her brother.
All she did was to wish for her brother to 'be killed' and didn't do anything.
That's was the main cause.
...then, what should I do?
The solution was very simple. Although it was very simple, Kiseki didn't notice it before.
Hyakki Yakou knew it the entire time, that's why it was always going berserk.
"Ahh... so that's it..."
Kiseki stopped crying and raised her face.
She knew what she had to do. She knew what was the best method to get killed. That was,

——To make Kiseki's brother want to kill her.

Kiseki realized the truth and relaxed her body.
Her heart beating fast from dread, her agitation from the false happiness, her memories of suffering... in this moment, she easily accepted all of it.
Overlooking the sea of meat flowing around her, sloooooowly, the corners of her mouth distorted.
"Whaat."
With a peaceful smile, Kiseki indulged in her impulses.
The restless wriggling sea of meat slowly gathered in their point of origin.
Like children returning to their mother, they have all gathered together.
Smiling, Kiseki gently stroked the mass of meat crawling out of her own flesh.
"...Onii-chan's important things.... I should have broken them all."
If she does so, her brother will hate her. He will try to kill her.
No, not just his important things. That's not enough.
Killing all people in this world, leaving Onii-chan and Kiseki would do best.
If she does so, her brother will kill her than commit suicide, losing his reasons to live.
They would undoubtedly die together.
"I wonder why haven't I noticed such a simple thing until now... all I did was to rely on Onii-chan... pitiful Onii-chan... it must have been difficult."
Kiseki felt really apologetic towards her brother, who continued to agonize himself tormented by guilt.
She too, had to do her best for her happiness.
"...Kiseki will do her best too."
Together with these words, strength came back to her.
"Let's do my best."
No matter how painful it was, she was able to stand up.
"Let's do my best... do my best. Do my best, do my best, do my best, do my best, do my best, do my best, do my best, do my best——do my best do my best!"
With a smile she raised both her hands, reaching out towards the light.
And when she did, this false happiness collapsed like shattering glass.
Kiseki no longer saw a dream. She didn't rely on a dream.
Happiness was something she had to obtain by herself.
"............"
In the collapsing dream, waiting for her awakening, there was another person with a smile who attempted to disappear.
Abruptly, Kiseki grasped the other Kiseki by the collar. The other Kiseki's breath turned rough and she painfully gasped.
Still smiling, Kiseki turned toward her other self with doll-like movements.

"You see, Kiseki noticed. I have already realized that these little ones are part of me by myself. But, *Kiseki is Kiseki*. There's no 'other me'."
"....."
"Who aaare you? Why are you in Kiseki's dream?"
The other Kiseki, still having her neck tightly held smiled, her lips formed a crescent moon shape.
"...f-fufufu, hahahahaha, wonderful... it's just as I thought. If it's you... you'll be able to accept your own power.

——I believed in that!"

The other Kiseki's appearance changed into that of a blonde priest.
"Having a body of a demon and soul of a human, Kusanagi women were supposed to be unable to withstand the size of the vessel, is what I heard! But you kept your personality as Kusanagi Kiseki for a long time! Even though you experienced torture and death countless times, you remained sane!"
Ecstatic at the sight of awakened Kiseki, the priest——Haunted applauded her.
"It's impossible normally, you know?! Having a heart broken, soul broken, becoming a husk is natural! And yet you managed to bear it fully! In order to obtain your happiness by yourself! ...you're of my type, a strong woman... ha, as I thought, once again I realize that Kusanagi are strong people who don't give up 'hope'!"
"Answer the question."
Kiseki further tilted her head and broke Haunted's neck like a tree branch.
Haunted's body was hanging just on the skin of his neck and meat, yet he continued to applaud her.
"I see... it's a dream, so obviously you can't die... ehehe."
Shyly, she rubbed her nose with a finger.
"But surely, I'll kill you. Kiseki needs to kill all the people in the world. See, if I don't, Onii-chan won't kill Kiseki. I need to do my best."
"Yes... yes, indeed it is as you say, Kiseki-san. But do it slowly. You can't annihilate the human race all at once. Bit by bit... to give them a feeling of loss... give them hope until the very end before finishing them off. If you don't, his hatred and despair won't accumulate. If you suddenly kill off the entire humanity, he'll be astonished and won't be able to accept the situation, since he might commit suicide by himself you need to do it slowly and carefully——"
"I know that even if don't tell me."
With a wet sound, Kiseki swallowed Haunted with the mass of meat.
After confirming it has turned quiet, she once again raised her hands.
The light was spreading, her awakening was close.
There was lots things to do after she opens her eyes.
How refreshing. She should have done this right from the start.

While putting in effort to acquire happiness, Kiseki spoke of her resolve.
"Onii-chan... Kiseki will do her best."
Her cloudless eyes were shining with dream of happiness.
"I'll show you, I'll slaughter every single one of Onii-chan's important people."
She realized that her power was there in order to make her happy. And thus Kusanagi Kiseki,
Hyakki Yakou——has been led to true awakening.

□□□

In the woods about two mountains away from the First Research Facility, Haunted opened his eyes.
The black flowers he held in his hand withered exhausted and turned into sand.
It was the evidence of link being severed. From the □Flower of DespairBelladona□ Haunted has summoned and passed to Suzaku, a single one petal dropped on the floor. Manipulating that petal, he intruded in the apparatus that displayed dreams. His own spirit has submerged in Kiseki's dream.
Sitting on a stump, Haunted looked up at the moon in the sky contentedly.
□"...I don't get it. Haunted, don't you hate destruction?"□
His beloved sword he held by his waist asked, puzzled.
In response to that question, Haunted shook his head.
"I hate destruction. It leaves nothing behind. But what that girl will create, is not destruction. At the very least, *for that girl it's hope*."
□"...I still don't get it. Whatever it means for her, isn't she heading out to destroy the world. Why are you acting all satisfied here?"□
As he looked up at the full moon in the sky, the corners of Haunted's mouth distorted.
"It won't be destroyed. Definitely not. That's because there's a guy who's struggling in order to save her."
□"...you mean Kusanagi Takeru? I don't think he'll be able to do anything though..."□
"No, he can. I believe in him. After all, he is my enemy."
What's up with that confidence... after saying so, Nacht heaved a sigh.
"Result-wise, I guess I ended up helping Ootori Sougetsu. Kusanagi Kiseki would have awakened from the dream even without my help. It means I have significantly sped up her awakening."
He reached out to the moon and gripped his fist.
"Now, how will you save her? For her who has awakened in complete chaos, there's no longer any salvation."
Haunted prayed to the moon.
Ripen, ripen, save the worst chaos, refine your finest hope.
At that moment I will surely——drop you down to the pits of despair.

"If he sees that girl as she is now... I wonder what kind of face he'll make."

□□□

The evening before the First Research Facility's assault operation.
On the roof of the school building Takeru waited all alone.
It was needless to say who was he waiting for.
For his partner.
"....."
The moonless, cracked-up night sky was neither dark nor bright.
Nagaru said that this world is a fragment of mythological world.
It seemed to be the world Lapis was born in. Even though Lapis herself didn't remember it, but the vision he glimpsed during execution of God Hunter form was certainly similar to this landscape.
If their soul fused completely, Takeru would turn into a being whose only goal would be hunting gods.
Even if he tried to reject it and Lapis was to suppress it, her nature of god-slaying sword wouldn't allow it.
By erasing Takeru's memories of people important to him, she would eliminate his reason for rejecting the fusion.
But Takeru didn't fear Lapis. That girl's reason wouldn't accept Takeru forgetting everything and fusing with her.
Humans aren't living just by animalistic instincts. *Reason is a human instinct.* The reason exerting emotions of 'not wanting to lose anything' was a valuable thing. Takeru was born with soul of a demon and learned it by interacting with humans, then Lapis without a doubt learned it by interacting with him.
That's why Takeru believed in Lapis. Even if they befall a hopeless situation, he wouldn't ever blame her.
"No matter what happens... as if I'd let go of you. Even if I were to lose my memory, my hand won't let go of you."
Takeru vowed in silence and took a deep breath.
"These are my feelings... Lapis."
"...Host is being irresponsible."
He was aware of the presence behind him for a few minutes already.
Lapis was standing by the entrance to the roof. Feeling that, he closed his eyes.
"And what about feelings of the numerous people Host holds dear."
"Even if I lose my memories, I will definitely make new ones. As many times as needed... again and again. And you too are my comrade, it's the only way to allow Kiseki to live without betraying her."
"While you and the others might be convinced with that, the sadness after a loss will remain. As I thought, you should let go of me."
"I refuse. Absolutely not."

"Host is too selfish."
"You didn't know that? I am selfish. I insist on saving everything, I insist on being together with everyone no matter what. You knew that, right? I'm like a desperate brat, I can't help it."
"...but, that is why everyone yearns for you."
"I know they cherish me. I also know that everyone will be sad if I lose my memory. Still, I need your power and your presence. It's fine if we can continue to live on without using god-slaying power... but, there's no guarantee we won't have to use it in the future. That's why, even if by chance I was to lose my memory, I will——"
"You can't."
Being denied, Takeru tried to refute.
"Yeah——you can't. I won't forgive that either, definitely."
Hearing a voice other than that of Lapis, Takeru turned around.
At the entrance to the roof stood Lapis and one more person, it was Ouka's figure.
Ouka rested her back on the wall by the entrance and glared intensely at Takeru.
"It's just as Lapis Lazuli says. Are you stupid?"
"S-stupid, you... heck, why are you here?"
"You're an idiot. A fool. Stuupid, stuupid."
Hearing Ouka's unbecoming jeers, Takeru's was stunned.
Continuing to glare at him, Ouka moved away from the door and swiftly closed on him.
"What are you deciding on by yourself here. Why won't you talk about it with me? Why won't you talk with your comrades?"
"...n-no, I intended to tell you afterwards."
"Don't screw around. Why won't you think it over together with us? Lapis Lazuli is special to you? So we aren't? And if you go 'I wonder if it's special' and 'it's not like that', sorry but I'll smack you right away, grandly."
Ouka approached and grasped Takeru's collar.
And at the same time, the door opened showing three new figures.
It was Mari, Usagi and Ikaruga.
On everyone's face, there was anger. Just like Ouka, they glared scornfully at him.
"That's right, exactly, don't screw around! Takeru always says it, right? Even if we can do nothing about something, we'll somehow manage when we try together. What was that? Lip service?"
With a presence like that of a domineering wife, Mari lined up next to Ouka.
"Even though you are overburdened, why won't you let your comrades shoulder it? Just how far will you go for appearances? Do you think you are that great a person? If it's clumsiness, then you surely are best."
In the same manner, Usagi lined up next to them with a hand on her hip, looking at him with despise.

"It's fine to flirt with your beloved sword, but don't you forget about flirting with me. Also, it would be troublesome if you forgot the promise to become papa."
Ikaruga also lined up next to the others, when she said 'papa' the surroundings went "ah?" and glared at him. The platoon members drew closer, causing him to unconsciously step back.
"W-wait a moment... it's true that I should have consulted it with you all, heck, I intended to do it before the operation, but first Lapis must..."
"You said it's fine if you made new memories after losing them, right? Takeru, are you lookin' down on us?"
"I-I'm not... listen to me, Mari-san. I've no intention of losing them, I'm just saying that just in case, by chance I were to lose them, I'm not really——"
"There is no assuming something can happen by chance. If you are to save everything, make sure to save your memories as well. I will definitely hate it if I was to be forgotten by Kusanagi, understand? If that happens, I shall cry."
"Usagi... d-don't cry... I won't forget. It's just in case, I'm talking about preparedness."
"You intend to make Kanaria a fatherless child?!"
"Suginami isn't that logic leap too much?! Heck, why is everyone here?!"
Having his collar grasped by everyone, Takeru flailed his arms panicked. With all their strength together, they were able to easily lift him from the ground.
Ouka was the first one to let go of him, she stopped staring with scorn and smiled wryly.
"I have spoken with everyone on how to make it possible for you to remain together without losing memories and being assimilated. I have also asked Lapis Lazuli to accompany us."
Since the three others haven't let go of him yet, Takeru was puzzled while still being lifted in the air.
"A method to stay together without losing memory...?"
"Yeah. It seems like you're trying to do something by yourself, but with my and Vlad's skill it's possible to forcibly release God Hunter form. If Lapis Lazuli can't do it by her own will, I can release it instead."
".....ah."
Takeru had forgot about Vlad's intrinsic performance. Previously in combat it released Witch Hunter form. Using that experience, they must have guessed that God Hunter form can also be released.
Seeing him think about seriously, Ouka smiled.
"I have already forced the operative procedure into my head. It was a most difficult one I've learned until now... but I'll somehow manage. Believe in me and Vlad."
Ouka struck her chest with her fist. That confidence deserved trust.
Learning a God Hunter form operative procedure was something impossible

for a normal human. However, if it was Ouka, who's not a witch yet memorized tens of thousands operative procedure, he could believe it.
"...is that true, Lapis."
"...yes. I cannot say it's 100% safe, but if by chance we are unable to release God Hunter form, Ootori Ouka-sama and Vlad's power can be lent to stop the fusion."
She was expressionless, but in Lapis' eyes dwelled light of relief.
He was surprised that Ouka came up with such a method, but more than anything, he was surprised the most by Lapis who relied on comrade's power.
Until now Lapis only spoke to Takeru and didn't open to anyone else. Seeing her rely on someone else other than him made him honestly happy.
"Host."
Lapis walked beside Takeru and faced down anxiously. The three let go of Takeru's collar and he regained freedom.
"...forgive me for being a poorly-crafted sword. This will be the third time, but..."
"....."
"I too... if permitted to, want to stay with you. Once again... won't you please use me?"
Timidly, Lapis held out her small hand to Takeru.
Even without seeing her facial expression, her anxiety was being transmitted to him.
First she pouted about being let go of, then she suddenly wants to part and then once again she says she wants to be with him, she must have been expecting him to think that she's using him at her own convenience. Lapis thought the third contract might be rejected. She approached him feelings such anxiety.
As if to discard her anxiety, Takeru held her small hand.
"I said, I won't let go of you ever again haven't I?"
"...yes."
"We'll be together forever."
"....."
Lapis' hand he held was not cold as it always was. There was warmth in it that made him feel like holding it forever.
Let's cherish this relationship. No matter what, I won't let go of this hand.
Takeru swore in his mind.
" " " "....." " " "
Seeing the two's exchange, the remaining four people once again started to stare scornfully at him.
And for some reason, as if to enter between them everyone has overlapped their hands with his and Lapis'.
In silence, this situation where their hands overlapped lasted for a few seconds.

".....umm, I don't really mind but it turned out as if we made a team circle before a game."
What Takeru said was correct and the mood turned into one in which no one could speak up. Just what on earth were they doing on the roof in the night.
"I-it's good to do such a thing occasionally. It's the night before the operation. It's not a bad thing. A-also, I'll help with releasing so let me mix in too."
"Don't just enter your own world with Lapis... rather, you better tell me you'll be with me forever too!"
"We are all together. Leaving me out... leaving comrades behind is unforgivable."
"Who's going to do the cheer? What was it again? Uh, um, it was that... all for my sake and me for my own sake, was it?"
Everyone has gotten into a team cheer mood.
"Just how self-centered are you... wasn't it 'hurray'?"
"Isn't that for when you win...? Ah, maybe clap hands together?"
"No, that's also something you do when you win! Why clap now, everything is still ahead of us."
"How did it turn into this situation? The mood did not seem like it at all... just a moment ago, we were more serious."
"Well, we just went with the flow. One, two——God save us!! How about it?"
" " " "The operation will fail like this!" " " "
As they messed around, the platoon's shout somehow wasn't happening.
Even during the eve before a important operation, Small Fry Platoon was still being itself.
"....."
Overlooking the comrades who acted like that, Lapis stood expressionless.
She stared as five people overlapped their hands and bickered about something she was unable to understand, then in the end.
For just a moment——
"——Nn? Lapis... just now, did you smile...?"
Despite the bickering, Takeru didn't miss that moment.
The instant Takeru raised his voice, Lapis' expression turned back to being emotionless.
"...I didn't smile."
"N-no, I'm sure I saw it... definitely, just now you smiled happil——"
"I didn't smile."
Stubbornly, Lapis wouldn't admit it and committed herself to remain expressionless.
Usagi raised her hand and started hopping on spot.
"Yes, yess, I have seen it as well. She really smiled!"
"I wasn't smiling."
"That's surprising... I was also surprised to see her cry, but she's finally able to smile, huh."
"I didn't smile."

"Seriously? I can't even imagine it... how did it look like?"
"I'm saying I didn't smile."
"C-cameraa... your mobiles are fine! Someone give me one! One more time! Smile one more time!"

"I'm not smiling."
Pouting, Lapis continued to deny and the comrades tried to make her smile again.
Every time she was being asked to smile, she faced sideways.
Frustration in Lapis' heart was transmitted to Takeru and he was about to burst out laughing. Lapis having a conversation with their comrades was very unnatural, but it made him happy.
...if only Kanaria was here too.
Squinting and looking up at the sky, he thought of Kanaria who was somewhere else, alone.
Surely she must be resting before tomorrow's operation and sharpening her senses. Being able to fulfil revenge she was yearning for years, she must have been very excited.
However, in tomorrow's operation Kanaria won't be fighting.
Precisely because Takeru knew that, he looked up at the sky with complex feelings.

Chapter 5 - Alchemist, Assault

□□□

Yoshimizu Akira was a copy.
Real Akira was already dead, Akira who has survived was a different person who had her memories and personality.
No, she could be called a fake.
That meant, even if her DNA and memories were the same, her soul was different from the original's.
Unlike a homunculus that doesn't have a soul dwelling in it, a clone is a new life form that's born from an embryo and is recognized in the world as new life. In other words, a new soul dwelling inside of it is natural.
If original and clone both die, they turn into two souls and have pass on to a parallel world called 'Spirit World'. While it's unknown what kind of place is the Spirit World, spirits that are summoned from it using spiritualism only show mechanical reactions.
And even though it's possible to obtain information concerning the world of living from those spirits, apparently it's impossible to obtain any on the afterlife.
"If you were to die... I wonder if you're going to meet the real Akira in the afterlife?"
Kyouya muttered absent-mindedly while staring at Akira's copy.
This was the Alchemist's First Research Facility's L6 - XXX lab in which Kusanagi Kiseki was kept in. Kyouya and Akira were in a part that acted as a warehouse storing various homunculi. In order to use them as soldiers after transplanting Hyakki Yakou's cells into them, they were placed in here.
Akira was sleeping inside of a pod for homunculi that was filled with liquid.
"How does it feel to be a copy...? It must be hard, right. From now on, you're going to have to live shouldering doubts on whether you are real or not. Just see what happened, must be because you used to hit my head the entire time."
"....."
"...but, you can be at ease. Even if you're a copy, I'm going to treat you as usual. Crudely as usual, as irresponsibly as usual. Prepare yourself..."
"....."
"Well... if you hurry up and open your eyes, I won't mind acting gentle?"
She didn't answer. The only thing that answered him was the sound of the respirator providing her with oxygen.
".....I said this crude me is going to act gently here... say something... dumbass."

Akira had artificial respiration performed through her mouth and countless of tubes inserted into her body, every time he saw her he felt tightening in his chest.
Is there any point remaining alive like that, he asked himself every day.
As she remained asleep, whenever he looked into Akira's face Kyouya felt pain.
Maybe it would be better to cut off this life-supporting equipment and choose an easier path.
But, every time Akira's smile revived in his mind. That smile supporting his half-assed talent acted like a curse, not allowing him to give up.
Kyouya knew his own weakness. He learned that he can't fight all alone during his days with comrades. They continued to quarrel endlessly and there was nothing special about them, but to him, they were irreplaceable comrades.
And Akira, was an irreplaceable childhood friend.
A normal human one could find anywhere.
That was why 15th test platoon was Kyouya's important place.
"...don't leave me alone... I... only have you now."
He squeezed his fist on top of his knee and withstood the urge to shiver from loneliness.
"Hey, wake up... just like usual, smile in my direction..."
Feeling tears flow from his eyes, Kyouya strongly clenched his teeth.
"I don't care if you're a copy or not... I need you by my side."
"....."
"I can't continue being captain all alone... I'm tired..."
"....."
"Hey... Akira..."
"....."
"Say something...!"
Kyouya curled up and quietly shed tears. What he was holding in so far reached the limit and burst, tears overflowed endlessly.
Setting his heart completely on hatred and revenge was something more painful than an ordinary human can imagine. For countless distorted reasons he continued to take revenge on Inquisition's enemies, but even Kyouya's conscience acted up. The reason he had revenge in his mind was in order to feed Nero so that Akira could survive. Akira no longer was able to survive on Nero's life prolongation and was in a state where she had to receive help from Alchemist.
He could feel that there wasn't much time left. Alchemist could not be trusted. Forgetting about Akira, Suzaku was crazy about studying Hyakki Yakou. Akira was packed in the vault for homunculi and just left in this state.
What should he do? What does he need to do? What is it that he can do?

Kyouya shook his head as the words 'dead end' filled it. He's taking part in defending this place in order to have Akira cured by Suzaku. If it turns to worst, he can only to force the treatment via intimidation.
He stood up, the moment he was about to take action the automatic doors behind opened soundly.
Someone has come. Thinking it's a Suginami researcher, he turned around.
——There stood a pre-adjusted homunculi body.
".....aah?"
Puzzled he furrowed his eyebrows and glared at the homunculus that has appeared.
Even if the homunculus before adjustment had a shape of a human, it didn't wasn't a living organism but a mere meat and bones. By putting the homunculus in adjustment pod, the preferred DNA was inserted and it could function like a human.
Of course, homunculus had no soul and a mere doll following orders.
A doll without hair, eyes, nose, or even genitals has moved in front of Kyouya.
Was this Suzaku's handiwork? Or maybe she was sent by another researcher for homunculus adjustment...
Although he considered various possibilities, what he concluded was that a homunculus before adjustment and without brain is unthinkable to walk around.
"!! Summis desiderantes affectibus——"
Kyouya raised his hand towards homunculus in a hurry and expanded a magical circle under his feet.
At the same time in the homunculus' empty face appeared eyes and a mouth full of teeth.
The pale skin was dyed red as if smeared by blood.
There was no doubt, this homunculus had Hyakki Yakou's cells embedded in it.
"GUHGIGHGHH——GYAaAAaAAAAAAaAAA!"
Crying out like a newborn child, the homunculus leaped.
The possibilities were Suzaku's betrayal, researcher's mistake or—— Kusanagi Kiseki going out of control.
While being careful about Akira behind him, Kyouya's mind was filled with murderous intent.
In any case, there was one thing to do.
"——Malleus Maleficarum!"
At the same time as he spoke the Witch Hunter form's words of power, Kyouya squeezed Nero's trigger.

□□□

Four hours before the operation.

Takeru and the others adjusted their equipment and gathered in the school yard. Joining other teams and Kanata, they gathered a force numbering 20.
"Since diversion troop is already lurking in the facility's vicinity, we're going to start the operation immediately after arriving on the other side. It will take four hours before we arrive on the other side through transfer magic. For a moment, your consciousness might feel ambiguous as a side effect from the transfer's side effects, but there's no time so you'll have to immediately start running□."
In her usual laid-back tone, Nagaru spoke to the ones carrying out the operation.
Takeru looked at Nagaru who carried a huge radio like a randosel and thought 'it can't be'.
"...can it be that President comes as well?"
"Yup□, I'll stay by Kanata-san's side and act as the commander through the radio, keep the radio's switch on, kai□."
Saluting happily, Nagaru made a fuss.
Seeing her unchanging even at a time like this, Yuzuho and the seventh squad thought she lacked sense of urgency, but Takeru was thankful to her for acting like that.
After finally getting accustomed to the thought of having an opportunity to achieve their earnest wishes, they were very tense. He was thankful for her acting relaxed.
"Kusanagi-kun, did you take the item needed to save Kiseki-chan?"
"Yes. Of course."
Takeru once again confirmed that in his backpack there was homunculi foetus and the Possession's instant charm.
What he should do was to rescue captured Kiseki and use Possession□Install□ charm on Kiseki and the homunculi foetus.
The homunculi foetus was set to rapidly grow on spot to the set age after □Install□ completes insertion of Kiseki's soul in it.
Kiseki's body that had received the curse of Hyakki Yakou will turn into a husk after losing a soul, she will be released from pain of many years and despair. What's waiting for her ahead was a life of a homunculus, homunculi required a periodic adjustment but physically were almost identical to human beings.
If Inquisition was to cease operating, she would be able to live her life like an ordinary human.
Takeru put the homunculi foetus in the container and wrapped both hands around it as if it was dear to him.
...this time... I will definitely save you...
He prayed as if to reach Kiseki. Her sins, fate, he decided to shoulder it all. Even if the world doesn't forgive it, Takeru will save her. Laughing normally, crying, getting angry, making friends, finding a lover, getting married... he wanted to give Kiseki a normal life like that.

That was Takeru's happiness as well. It's not something he imposes upon someone else.
It's something he decided by himself.
".....Takeru."
Suddenly, someone put a hand on his shoulder.
When he raised his face, he saw Kanaria who had a very meek expression.
".....before the operation starts, there's something I need to tell you."
As if realizing something, Takeru took Kanaria and moved away from everyone.
"What is it?"
Turned with his back towards Kanaria, he asked.
Hesitantly Kanaria squeezed her fist and faced downwards.
"...Kana, won't help to save Kiseki."
"....."
"Kana has her own things to do. That's what I came here for in the first place."
"I don't really mind it even if you won't. It's true that I really want your strength, but I won't force you. But, didn't you come here in order to speak with Ikaruga?"
Even though Kanaria raised her face, Takeru was still turned with his back towards her.
"...! I already spoke with her. It was in vain. I don't care about what she's thinking any more. As I thought, it doesn't concern Kana. That's why——"
"Do as you please."
Takeru said that along with a sigh.
"I won't deny you revenge. I also have something similar, even now I don't feel like living on lukewarm feelings."
"....."
"But, let me give you an advice as the senior pupil."
"...what is it."
"While you exact your revenge, look behind you sometimes. Before you think there's nothing else for you, confirm that there isn't someone snuggling up and living together with you."
"Kana has no one like that...!"
Angrily raising her shoulders, Kana spat that out. Takeru thought it was useless to say anything else to her.
If talking with Ikaruga was in vain, she wouldn't listen to Takeru either.
"...if you think so, that's fine. I won't restrain you."
"....."
"But, if there's someone who tries to, I won't stop them either."
Takeru turned around and passed by Kanaria's side in silence.
He left her the words of advice as senior pupil. If she didn't understand it after speaking with Ikaruga and hearing it from him, he had his own ideas.

Between Kanaria's feelings and Ikaruga's feelings, if he were to prioritize one it would be Ikaruga's.
After returning back to where everyone was, he winked to Nagaru. Smiling wryly, she returned the wink. Pulling himself together he stood in front of his comrades.
"——Everyone, are you ready?"
He confirmed with everyone in the platoon. Although nervous, they seemed resolved.
Takeru took a breath and looked up. he saw the cracked-up sky.
Finally——it was time.
"I don't know what will the result be... that's why, I'll tell you one thing."
And looking away from the sky, this time he looked at each member one at a time.
Ouka, Mari, Usagi, Ikaruga... and Lapis.
Engraving their faces in his heart and memory.
"——Thank you for coming. Lend me your shoulder, everyone."
He entrust his heartfelt thanks and half of his burden to his comrades.
In response to his usual, straightforward words everyone nodded.
There was no need for superfluous words. Everyone in silence lent their shoulder to Takeru.
Just like he did for them.
Everyone took half of his burden.
Ouka materialized Vlad and held him in both hands. Mari was wearing her hat low on her eyes and released sparkling particles of magic from her fingertip. Usagi shouldered her beloved gun 'Rabbit Fang' on her back.
Ikaruga entered one of the Heretic Alliance's Dragoons.
And Takeru turned Lapis into particles, attaching her to his waist.
Other teams also completed their preparations and gathered by the transfer device placed in the centre of school yard.
"....."
In the end, Kanaria drew Lævateinn and stood next to Takeru.
Nagaru confirmed the time on clock.
"Ten seconds left□."
The transfer device started to buzz and a magical circle was expanded under their feet.
Feeling their bodies turn into particles, everyone gasped.
——The fight has begun.
Their bodies emitted light and they disappeared starting from their toes.
Takeru squinted and looked at Kanaria beside him.
That's when she has finally noticed.
"———?!"
Looking at her arms she got astonished. She was the only one who hasn't started to turn into particles by the transfer magic. Kanaria turned furious and glared at Takeru.
"...sorry, Kanaria. Looks like we can't take you after all."

"Takeru——you, it can't be!"
"It's not me. It was Ikaruga's decision."
Kanaria glared at Ikaruga who was inside of a Dragoon.
Ikaruga's face was covered by Dragoon's steel and couldn't be seen by Kanaria.
"I told you. I won't be getting in the way if someone wants to stop you."
"!! ...you betrayed me...!"
"I don't care what you think. This is Ikaruga's answer."
"W-wait! Take Kana with you!"
Along with a roar, Kanaria tried to catch Takeru.
But before her fingertips could touch him, Takeru and the others disappeared altogether.
Left behind, Kanaria fell on her knees. Stunned.
And,
"D-damnn... DAMN ITTT!"
At the same time as she hit the ground with both her arms, she roared into the sky.

The detached force which transferred from Heretic Alliance's home base appeared in the towering mountains west of the First Research Facility.
Everyone knelt on spot and was either coughing or vomiting.
"W-we arrived...?!"
Ouka lent Usagi a shoulder and stood up.
Takeru too, helped Mari stand up while remaining on his guard. The time they experienced was an instant, but four hours have already passed. Their location was a deep forest on a slope and between the trees, in the distance they could see First Research facility.
First, he confirmed everyone's location. The 35th platoon... everyone has transferred successfully. Other teams, Nagaru and Kanata seemed to be safe.
"E-eh? Where's Kana-chan?"
Staggering, Mari asked Takeru.
"...left behind."
Hearing his reply Mari was surprised for a moment, but soon after she downcast her eyes convinced.
Nagaru squat down and got in touch with the diversionary force through the radio.
Immediately after, a roar echoed in the First Research Facility they could see between the trees.
"...it begun. Everyone, you're prepared right?"
At the same time Nagaru stood up, different from how she was until now, she spoke with a fearless smile.
"From here on——it's our first counter-attack."
The signal fire of war has been raised, everyone on the spot breathed in grandly.

And then everyone held their breath at once.
"Magic Academy West Side Pureblood Party's 'Seventh Squad'——sortie!"
Sage raised his wand and started running.
"Gods' Embers 'Sixth Guard Troop'——onwards!"
Yuzuho poised her spear in front and started sprinting.
And,

"AntiMagic Academy's 35th Test Platoon——operation start!"

Pulling his sword, at the same time as he made a knight-like stance, Takeru kicked off the ground.
He cut through, starting the battle. Everyone ran down the mountain as if rolling.
"——Everyone, continue as you are and get off the mountain! Don't stop no matter what happens!"
Everyone did as ordered to by Nagaru through the radio. Ouka ran right next to Takeru and Mari expanded flying wheels on her legs and flew while avoiding the trees. Ikaruga put Usagi on the Dragoon's shoulder and moved downhill.
Don't stop no matter what. That's what they were told, but going down a slope in middle of a forest was very difficult as the footing was bad.
However, the detached force of Heretic Alliance was accustomed to this kind of situations. It didn't matter whether they get hit by a rolling tree or not.
Just rush forward. Believing that his comrades will keep up with him, Takeru dashed.
Vigilant to the limit, he stared in the woods. There were no enemies. But after reaching this point he felt line of sight on them.
The shade of grass, gap between the trees. He squinted looking at the gap between branches.
No doubt. There were countless sentry bots and mines installed there.
"————!!"
Involuntarily he wanted to stop contrary to the instructions as death was waiting in front of them. But,
"I see them all——please believe in me."
Hearing Kanata's voice in his ear, with brute force Takeru moved his legs that were about to stop, moving forward.
——*fshooo*
Immediately after, a howl of wind sounded from behind and something passed right beside them.
A roar and sound of bursting reached them from the front.

□□□

Kanata was in the vicinity of the summit that had a nice view, wearing a camouflage cloth and peeking out from on top of a cliff. She could see the entire forest under her.
"——Maintain full auto mode. It's fine to just detonate them, 'Nobunaga'."
"All right."
Her beloved gun, The Malleus Maleficarum VIII “NOBUNAGA” fired, supporting the detached force that ran down the mountain.
Nobunaga's performance was special. The greater distance from the enemy was, the greater was his power.
Bolt action mode had a maximum range of six kilometres. For a normal sniper rifle that range was exceptional, but considering the power increases with range has its drawbacks. If the projectile released turns huge, it's disadvantageous for precise shooting.
There's no problem if it's one versus one long distance combat, but it's disadvantageous when assisting comrades.
Since in close combat its performance was about the same as a regular sniper rifle, at a glance one could its convenience of use is poor.
However, just like Nero and Ivan, its mode can be switched.
Full auto mode had a range of two kilometres. Its power was about the same as that of a 9mm handgun. However, its non-standard performance is that it can be locked on a target that's captured in the centre of reticle.
She adjusted the magnification of the scope and overlooked the entire troop as they progressed. The scope itself didn't have any special performance. All it could change was magnification, there was no thermovision nor infrared.
That's where Kanata's abnormal eyesight comes in, allowing her to see signs of the enemy.
"———I see it, 10 in the trees, 20 on the ground——lock on complete."
"Fire."
——*Pshh&, *pshh*, *pshh*!* A quiet gunshot echoed continuously. Tiny bullets emitted from the muzzle drew an arc and slipped through the trees to the target.
They landed, setting off the mines and destroying the sentry bots.
"Hahha! They noticed faster than I though! Shure's gotten interestin'!"
"Cut the pointless chatter."
Pulling the bolt that vigorously jumped out from the barrel, Kanata aimed at the Dragoons lying in wait ahead of Takeru and the others to ambush them.
"Distance."
"Ain't that about a 1000 yards? There's enough firepower."
"Stop being sloppy and western-crazed. You're just a sniper rifle."
Without relying on Nobunaga, she measures the distance by while squeezing the trigger. She immediately pulled the bolt and trigger again. A total of three times, the time she needed to do that was merely five seconds.
Dragoons made of Blue Crystal were broken to smithereens with a single blow.

Furthermore she destroyed entire set of mines behind them, leaving only scorched earth behind.
"Congratulaciones, Kanata!"
Turning a deaf ear to Nobunaga who was in high spirits, she changed back to full auto mode and continued to process both mines and sentry bots.
The enemy was already aware of the surprise attack from behind.
Changing to bolt action again, Kanata alternated between Dragoons that gathered behind the research facility and the traps installed in the way of Takeru and others' travel, watching over them.
"That's right... don't turn around, run forward with all you have... I will deliver you safely without fail."
With guts and pride of an ex-EXE member, Kanata vowed while looking at their backs.

□□□

Passing by the Dragoons bursting right in front of them, Takeru ran through the flames of an explosion.
Oonogi-san's amazin'
Having Kanata's cover allowed them to be at ease. Even though the trees grew thick, mines exploded wherever they went and sentry bots were all destroyed before they could fire. It was like an invincible defence system. At this rate they'll be able to go down the mountain and enter the facility.
Not having to anticipate anything and just running forward felt good.
"You're almost at the forest's entrance. Kanata-san's invincible assistance ends there. After you get down snipers in charge are to stay in the back. The security in the back is tighter than expected so don't let anyone stray even if it turns into close combat!"
"Roger!"
Takeru raised his speed and moved between rocks.
He was accustomed to running in the mountains from early age. Kicking off rocks and moving as if flying around. Even though he was swept by blasts caused by Kanata's assistance, he moved as if nothing happened.
And, the moment he saw light peek out from between the trees, Takeru kicked off from the last rock and invoked Soumatou.
His body soared and he broke through the gap between the trees.
"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"
Swinging the sword in his hand in mid-air,
"——Malleus Maleficarum!"
And triggered Witch Hunter form at the same time as he left the forest.
A veil of azure-coloured particles followed him like a tail and covered his body.

Because he was jumping from a high place, the distance to the earth's surface was about 30 metres. However, the First Research Facility was even taller. According to information, it was 50 metres high.
It's big... still!"
He changed Lapis' mode into that of a 10 metres long great sword.
Takeru released a technique powered with his entire body at the outer wall that has appeared in front of him.
"Double-Edged style——Yamata no Orochi!"
Releasing eight slashes in an instant, he chopped-up the wall made from orichalcum.
Zzzun——! With such a sound, the wall was sliced.
However, it did not fall. It was too shallow. It wasn't deep enough to cut apart a 10 metres thick orichalcum wall. Takeru tried to release another technique the moment he landed, but a black-haired girl jumped from behind him.
"Guards' Spearsmanship style——Eternal Flash!"
The attack released from beside him extended to the wall like a giant swirling tornado.
The spear she held in her hand let out a silvery shine and swirling, it hit the wall.
Before the huge wall could collapse, Yuzuho poised her spear to the side.
"Please, don't think you're the only one good at close combat, okay?"
In response the provocative look in Yuzuho's eyes Takeru smiled.
"...no, didn't it collapse because of my eight slashes?"
"?! What's up with those excuses of yours!"
When she heard Takeru's words who prided himself in close combat, blood vessels appeared on Yuzuho's temple. And when the two started quarrelling like that,
From the other side of the collapsed wall Dragoons have come out one after another.
They numbered twenty. All of them were the cutting-edge machines made from Blue Crystal.
Takeru's reaction who was playing around with Yuzuho was slightly late.
The railgun's muzzle was aimed at the two and the Dragoon was about to fire, that moment.
"——The two idiots over there, don't stop."
When they heard a voice from behind, a huge rust-coloured magical circle covered the entire area.
"【Corrosive BarrierAdol Field】"
Along with the magic name, reddish-brown magical particles overflowed, then attached themselves to Dragoon's armour and railguns, when the light has disappeared they have been changed into rust.
The rust continued to spread, covering Dragoon's entire body.
Although there was a sound of the trigger being pulled, their guns didn't react. On the contrary, the Dragoon that tried to move its joint was unable

to and fell. Even after falling the rust continued to spread, the Dragoons lost their original form in a matter of seconds and soon enough 20 machines were decayed and in tatters.
Agape, seeing a phenomenon that caused Blue Crystal to rust, Takeru and Yuzuho turned to look behind. Sage stood there raising his wand and with a cool expression.
"Why did you have to go and destroy the wall. Leave defence to me, hurry up and proceed."
Acting cool until the end, Sage passed next to Takeru and Yuzuho.
Furthermore, behind him moved his comrades.
"Takeru□ we'll leave you behind□!"
"Stop flirting with that religious woman!"
"That was quite flashy□."
Mari flying with magic, Ouka similarly flying with Witch Hunt form and Usagi riding on the shoulder of Ikaruga's Dragoon that had its wings expanded have all moved ahead.
Gods' Embers members also were flying in the sky using broom-type catalysts.
"□□□□! Stop acting lazy you all! Hold down your skirts while flying! It's unbecoming!!"
Raising her shoulders in anger, Yuzuho climbed on the debris following them.
Thinking about it deeply, whether its witches or his comrades from 35th platoon, Takeru realized he forgot that there were many who could fly. Even Ikaruga was able to fly for a short period of time with the Dragoon.
□"I intended to use magic thruster matching the jump, but since Host was in high spirits I have cancelled it."□
"...thanks for that."
Squinting, Takeru passed above the debris by jumping.
On the other side of the wall, other members have already started the battle with Dragoons.
Takeru caught up and participated in the battle using his sword.
Even so.
The other teams were more reliable than he imagined.
Although seventh squad was also a group of dropouts, they covered for their individual disadvantages and took down the enemy with their cooperation.
Notable thing was that Sage's fighting style specialized in defence. While maintaining a barrier corroding all material, using particles of rust he stopped enemy attacks. In the current situation with enemy being just Dragoons, he was invincible.
The fighting style of sixth guard was also unique. The only one attacking was Yuzuho who recklessly went ahead. Everyone else has devoted themselves to enhancing her attack and defence as well as recovering her from damage. Thanks to her subordinates strengthening and recovery, Yuzuho boasted of matchless strength.

"Those with damaged weapons and catalysts come to me. I'll reinforce them with property inversion magic."
"My subordinates will heal your wounds! You can go on without worrying about damage!"
It turned into a battle where every team took advantage of their characteristic.
And the each team's characteristics brought huge benefits to entire force.
It was the first time they had such a stable battle. Compared to their desperate battles when they were covered in wounds, the sense of security was on a completely different level.
Even so, they had no intention of going easy.
35th Test Platoon too, did not lose in terms of individual ability.
Just when the other two teams have mostly annihilated the Dragoons guarding the back, a loud roar has resounded in the research facility's main street.
Huge hatches opened at the crossroads and what appeared vigorously catapulted from inside were massive bodies.
Two wyvern-type Mechanical Dragons. They didn't know if they were strengthened with a summoning, but even without that Alchemist's technology was capable of reproducing a dragon's threat. It looked like the material their armour's material was Blue Crystal... it had the same hardness as the dragon in Fifth Research Facility.
The sixth guard was horrified as the dragons appeared.
That's when Takeru had dashed out from between the two teams.
"Ouka hold them down with heavy fire! Suginami and Usagi support! Mari, I leave left one to you!"
" " " "Roger!" " " "
Along with the reply, Mari flew right beside Takeru.
Behind him, Ouka rose up and squeezed Vlad's triggers aiming for the ground.
——「Tepes Rain」
Momentarily, a huge magical circle has appeared in the sky and on the ground, a rain of stakes and needles assaulted the dragons. They were stuck on the catapults for a moment and their movements stopped.
As soon as they understood they are restrained, the inside of dragons' closed mouths were dyed with magic of ultramarine colour.
However, the test platoon did not miss it.
Usagi who has been staying in the rear lied down on the ground and focused on the dragon's mouth. Further behind her, Ikaruga inside of a Dragoon opened a missile pod and poised the railguns she was dual-wielding.
"——I won't let you!"
「"——It's not to my liking, but, everything - fire."」
Usagi fired two auroral bullets, hitting enemies' mouth. Ikaruga followed up when the dragons grandly staggered. Although they were unable to destroy

Blue Crystal armour, auroral bullets caused an outburst of Dragon property magical power accumulating in enemy's mouth.
The aftermath of Dragon Breath's outburst passed beside Takeru and Mari grazing them.
The one who attacked first was Mari.
"【Auroral Collider】!"
A magical circle was deployed in an instant and she thrust her hands in front.
Then, the magical power accumulated on her palms turned into a rainbow-coloured thunder, assaulting the staggering dragon. It was an 【Aurora Cannon】 enchanted with 'Electrification' magical property.
The thunder bullet landed on the dragon's heart. The armour wasn't pierced, however, the thunder bullet dug into the equipment inside and the rainbow-coloured current flowed inside of the dragon's body.
With a loud sound the dragon's right side was broken.
"Takeru!"
"——Got it!"
Takeru who was close to the dragon on the left jumped up high towards the heavens. Propelled by magical power, he ascended above the dragon and rotated his body vertically.
Then,
"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Mantis Slope!"
Turning his sword into a zweihander he slashed through the dragon's brain. His swordsmanship refined by many battles no longer had any problem cutting apart Blue Crystal. Rotating with a momentum like that of a mowing machine, he cut the dragon down to its legs.
When Takeru crushed into the asphalt leaving his momentum as is. The two dragons broke and both fell down.
However, it wasn't enough. Behind the dragons there was a horde of Dragoons surging in a wide area.
Riding on the momentum of his landing, Takeru continued to spin sideways.
"Everyone, fire your magic towards me! Lapis! Twilight Enchant!"
【"Understood."】
He instructed everyone through radio.
This cooperative attack was explained to other teams in case a need arises.
Takeru believed in his comrades from Heretic Alliance.
In response to his instruction, those who could use magic fired bullets towards him in unison. Maintaining the rotation, Takeru cut the magical bullets one by one continuing to absorb them in the blade shining with azure colour.
The moment his centrifugal force reached its peak, he moved his foot forward and at the same time he swung the huge-turned sword sideways.
"——Single Wheel!"
【"Enchantment reversal, flexible material release."】
At the same time as Takeru's and Lapis' voices overlapped,

"OOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAaaAAAaaa!!"
From the azure-coloured blade a highly-concentrated magical power was released.
The magic emitted from the blade turned into a slash and cut apart the buildings in the surrounding area all at once, almost all Dragoons gathered had their upper and lower parts bid farewell to each other. The fallen Dragoons were caught up in the building's collapse and crushed. Takeru who was rotating stopped using his feet and returned the sword's shape back to that of a nodachi.
Other teams seeing the outstanding individual abilities of the 35th platoon were stunned. Sage tilted his neck, placing a hand on his chin and Yuzuho opened her mouth dumbfounded.
"Hmm. I really can't tell which part qualifies them as 'small fries' or 'dropouts'."
"I-it's thanks to their weapons! With a good tool I could do that too!"
While other teams stood surprised, Takeru and others started running again.
The sixth guard and seventh squad chased behind them, intermingled as if competing and continued to cooperate. In order to fulfil each other's objective, they entrusted their backs to each other regardless which power they represented.
Heretic Alliance didn't stop.
Their experience and skills that allowed them to survive many battles were already extraordinary.
Joining a single faction, their force turned immense.

□□□

After confirming the detached force has invaded the inside, Kanata's breathing returned back to normal.
The power of three participating teams was beyond her imagination.
Like that, there was no need to cover them. The moment range was extended the projectile turned too huge and her shooting would just get in the way. Until they arrived in the lab she would be better off refraining from shooting.
Kanata continued to watch everyone's progress through the scope.
"Ohh□ everyone's doing their best□."
As Nagaru's voice sounded by her side all of a sudden, Kanata jumped up screaming "hyaa".
Before she realized, Nagaru dressed in ghillie suit stood beside her holding binoculars in one hand.
"Don't scare me like that! Why do you have to erase your presence for no reason every single time?!!"
"I'm known for my weak presence□."

Nagaru moved the binoculars away and laughed with a "nishishi".
Kanata could affirm it wasn't weakness of presence. As an ex-EXE member who started her career as a 'Banshee' her searching ability was top-class among the Inquisitors. She can't miss a single faint sound in the radius of a kilometre.
And yet, Nagaru was able to easily circumvent Kanata's vigilance. The person herself said that her combat performance in school was disastrous, but it was very suspicious.
Angry that she was being outmatched again, Kanata once again looked at the detached force.
"Although enemy's resistance was stronger than anticipated, it's going well. As expected of people Hoshijiro-san scouted. We can expect a lot from their activities in the future."
"Hmm, if they want to I'll put them to use□. From now on the war is going to intensify, they've got lots of their own stuff to deal with so I won't force them□."
"With that said though, there's no place for them other than Heretic Alliance. I can't think of them not cooperating with us."
"Ohh□ surprisingly scheming of you□ Kanata-san. Is that what they call wisdom of age?"
"Please don't say it as if I'm an inhuman adult...!!"
"Naw naw□ I'm not saying it's a bad thing□. Kanata-san is someone who's doing her best in order to change the way Inquisition treats 'Banshee's' as expendables. I think you're a passionate, wonderful person."
"...even if you praise me now, you're not going to get anything."
"I really can't tell why you can't get married□."
"□□□! How's the diversionary troop faring?!"
Her expression turning into one looking similar to that of a stone statue, Kanata requested Nagaru's reconnaissance report.
Still peering through the binoculars, Nagaru stopped grinning and turned serious.
"It's going so well to the point it's too well."
"...that's strange."
"It is. Not only were all of their forces unmanned, they divided their forces perfectly in two between the front and the back. It means that we've been read. Well, if we were noticed beforehand they would have strengthened their defences further."
"Mechanical Dragons appeared as well but you can't say they're everywhere. Is there a possibility of rescue targets being already moved to a different location?"
"...I don't think so. Speaking of possibilities..."
Scratching her head troubled Nagaru continued.
"Just earlier, we were assaulted by an EXE member who had Hyakki Yakou cells transplanted into her. That Magnolia person."

"Yes, I've heard of it. We captured her and isolated her in our home base didn't we. Did you obtain any information from her?"
"If we did, we might have postponed the operation… no, I guess not. We would have taken decisive action before its too late□, if we did poorly crisis would befall humanity□."
Kanata squinted as he looked over the scope.
"...let's strengthen our vigilance. If there's any report of movement, instruct the members precisely."
"I'm considering withdrawal. But I intend to do our best until the very last moment. We can't miss this opportunity, otherwise it won't end well for them□."
Once she confirmed the detached force's safety through the scope, Kanata looked at the centre of L6 lab.
The lab that didn't have a single light lit was eerie, like a nest of monsters.
The facility's penetration was going well, problems start from here onwards.
You never know what might happen. Even the most terrifying things might.
Kanata pulled Nobunaga's bolt, preparing for everything.

□□□

The detached force advanced smoothly.
After taking down the Dragoons, they challenged the Mechanical Dragons all together every time they appeared.
Even if they got injured, the guards' members treated them instantly. Other than those specializing in combat who were, Takeru, Ouka and Yuzuho, sorcerers and everyone else was being protected by Sage's barrier. The rearguard were snipers and Ikaruga, who acted as their guardian.
The perfect cooperation served as their offence and defence, there was not a single casualty on their side.
"——Mikado! Now!"
After cutting apart a dragon's armour, Takeru yelled towards Yuzuho.
"You don't need to say it!"
Yuzuho appeared from behind him and thrust at the armour with her entire body.
Clad in magical power, Yuzuho turned into a meteor that pierced through the dragon's body using her spear.
"HAAAAaaaaa!!"
From the sky even further above, Ouka fired □Count's Fang□ bursting the dragon's brain and fully stopping it from functioning.
□"Ootori! Don't move!"□
The moment dragon was taken down, Usagi's voice caused Ouka to feel cautious about her sides. A flight-type Dragoon attacked her swinging a railblade.

Before its blade could reach Ouka, the Dragoon's head was blown away and it fell to the ground.
With no time to thank Usagi, another message arrived in her ear.
"——The enemy has circled around us! Cover the rearguard!"
Horrified by the voice in the radio, Takeru and Ouka looked towards the back.
There, the rear guard was surrounded by countless Dragoons and UAV's who slipped around.
Those UAV's weren't normal sentry bots.
"——Suicide-bombers!"
Takeru shouted and rushed to the rear guard at the same time.
But there was no need for that. As if to stand in the way of the UAV's countless rainbow-coloured spheres have entered between them. In response to them The UAV's exploded on spot.
Standing on the top of a building, Mari looked down on the rear guard.
Sage who was going to defend the rearguard looked up at her and spoke to the intercom.
"Woman, leave us to do our job and dispose of Dragoons instead."
Hearing that Mari furrowed her eyebrows.
His eyes said it all. 'Don't mind us'.
"I don't care what happens then! ——Aurora Barrage!"
With a fearless smile Mari rained Sage's vicinity with most powerful magical bullets she could make. Just before they hit, Sage covered the rearguard's humans with a protective barrier, a collective of rust.
The bombardment of Aurora property's magical bullets scorched the earth in the spot rearguard was in.
As the smoke wouldn't clear for up for a while, her face gradually turned pale.
"W-wait a second...? Eh, it was 'we can withstand it, it's okay' right?! No way, did I overdo it?!"
"...calm down."
Hearing a distorted voice mingled with noise, Mari was relieved.
The smoke has cleared up and she could see that rust barrier was in good state. After releasing the barrier Sage raised his blonde hair in a cool manner and glanced at her.
"My defence can stop everything. Even if it's magic of Aurora property."
Greatly annoyed, Mari's face cramped up.
"...even though I was holding baaack? If I was serious I would eras——"
"Mari, leave it at that."
As Takeru's voice sounded from the radio, Mari inflated her cheeks.
"B-but, Takeru!"
"——Our target has come in sight."
Hearing that, Mari looked towards Takeru.

Before she realized, they have arrived at the L6 lab's vicinity. Even though it should be still far away, it was huge enough to make them feel it was right in front of them.
"……so it was this big."
Glaring at the eerie appearance of the lab, Mari chased after Takeru.

The detached force arrived at the crossroads that was pre-determined position and stopped in middle of the passage.
Takeru who was in the front looked up at the L6 Lab that was towering ahead over the central road.
L6 - XXX Lab was quiet enough to call it strange.
It had a geometric shape and didn't have a single window. Like a distorted, continuously enlarged castle. Although its appearance was reminiscent of a labyrinth, he couldn't imagine what it looked like inside of the structure.
As he looked up at this building, a mysterious dread welled up starting from his feet. There was a huge mental load just from looking at it.
"……"
From this point onwards they wouldn't cooperate with other teams. They all had to proceed on their own path, separately.
Takeru took a deep breath and looked back, he stood in the middle of crossroads.
Sage and Yuzuho moved beside him.
Alternating, he stared at their faces and stuck out his fist in front.
"Let's do it right."
When Takeru spoke concisely, Sage and Yuzuho stuck out their fist in the same way.
"Agreed. 30 minutes later, let's meet in here."
"Fortunes of war with you… is all I'll say."
The three nodded at each other and bumped their fists.
Turning their backs to each other, they started running on their own paths.
Although they were allied only for a short time, the three teams with a similar history joined hands. Even if they become enemies one day, they'll never forget this alliance. If possible, I would like to fight together on battlefield again as allies, Takeru prayed.
"Usagi, I leave assistance at the entrance to you. I want the other two to join us for a little bit longer as well."
"All of us have set-up on high ground… leave it to us."
Usagi's voice was trembling slightly.
"…but surely… you must come back, all right? I… none of us will move from here until you're back."
Hearing her clearly tearful voice, Takeru felt his chest tighten.
This was not the time for reluctance.
Right now, he just had to do all to protect the promise.
"——Yeah, I'll take everyone and come back for sure. Including Kiseki!"
He squeezed the sword strongly.

Failure is not allowed. He will protect comrades and save Kiseki. Just how difficult the path to fulfil this goal was, he knew right from the start and was resolved to take it.
He continued to run up until now believing in the possibility of saving her. And now, that possibility was right in front of him.
After coming this far, as if he'd let it go!
"...Ouka, no matter what happens, absolutely don't you stray away from Takeru!"
Mari running next to him said in a serious voice.
Although Ouka was taken aback when called by first name, her expression changed when she looked at Mari from profile.
"...please...!"
What she couldn't do, Mari entrusted to Ouka.
Takeru and Lapis also felt the same as Mari did.
"IF something is to happen, don't hesitate and shoot me."
□"It is a request from me as well. If something were to happen, we'll rely on you.."□
Taking in everyone's wishes, Ouka looked forward in anticipation and just strongly nodded.
".....got it!"
Hearing a strong reply, Mari was at ease leaving everything to her.
Takeru was also encouraged by Ouka and turned his attention to Ikaruga who ran behind him.
□"....."□
The only ones knowing the reason why Ikaruga participated in the battle this time, was just Takeru and Nagaru. He felt that their comrades were wondering about it, but they didn't inquire.
They knew each other for long time now. Her comrades could already understand how she felt.
L6 - XXX Lab was right in front of them.
Aiming for the castle of darkness, the 35th Test Platoon invaded.
Holding the slight hope that was left, embracing it in their chests.

□□□

30 minutes after Takeru and the others departed from Heretic Alliance's to invade.
Kanaria hugged her knees under the tree in the school yard.
Why did Takeru and others leave her behind... Kanaria wasn't that much of a kid not to know it. If one of the members is caught up in revenge, there's a high possibility of trouble appearing as operation progresses. Although she didn't like the way they did it, she could understand being removed from the operation.

Because she didn't feel like putting a stop to her revenge, it was natural to be left behind.
However, she wondered if it was true that Ikaruga moved by herself in order not to let her participate in the operation.
"She wants to stop Kana from fighting...! She's cowardly and unfair... why does she continue to stand in Kana's way...!"
While staring at Lævateinn that was piercing the ground, Kanaria grit her teeth.
The blade of her partner was rusted. At this rate, her own blade will also decay and rot away.
Not wielded, the blade called 'revenge' would rust...
"How long will it continue?"
"...shut up..."
"Do you really think Isuka would rejoice?"
"...that's...! Even Kana is...!"
Kanaria knew just why was she so frustrated.
It was because what Ikaruga said was right.
She knew that Isuka didn't desire revenge.

——She knew that ever since she heard the origin of her name from Isuka.

"……the parent who gave me a name..."
Kanaria recalled the conversation she had with Isuka.
There were only few things Isuka spoke of to her.
Since she was being re-educated and even a little bit of emotions would cause her brain to feel severe pain, Isuka avoided talking about Kanaria.
Only at times she was absolutely unable to suppress her feelings, Isuka felt enough pain to wail and scream. The emotions of both love and hate she had for Ikaruga were on rampage. That she left her behind and escaped alone, that she picked up the picture book, that she resorted to tricks when making Kanaria. Her everyday life went on as she let out her anger. After she was tired of crying and screaming, she always quietly spilled small droplets of tears, thinking of wanting to meet Ikaruga.
Even when Kanaria approached to comfort her, she was rejected by Isuka.
Sometimes she was blamed, told it's her existence was at fault.
But, after having a screaming bout Ikaruga embraced Kanaria.
"You're something Ikaruga left behind, take her place."
She knew, that the affection wasn't directed towards her but towards Ikaruga. Kanaria was happy even though she knew that for Isuka who has awakened to emotions and felt loneliness worse than all the pain, she was a mere substitute.
She was happy just knowing that her mother needed her.
Every time, Kanaria embraced her and took a deep breath to engrave Isuka's scent in her memory.
While that how she felt... the one who let go of her was Isuka.

Because she was being suspected by Alchemist, Isuka handed Kanaria over to Valhalla.
When she threw a tantrum for the first time during a parting with her mother, Isuka said.
"People of Suginami are named after birds, it seems that it's implying that they won't be able to leave the cage called Alchemist. The bird called canary has the strongest impression among all caged birds. I think it really suits you, who was an experimental animal."
Speaking with her usual cold tone, Isuka stared at Kanaria.
"...however, sadly, the parent who gave you that name didn't think so. Kanaria from the picture book the name was taken from turned human, and grasped the freedom called 'family'. Your name, Kanaria was given with such feelings."
Isuka moved beside sobbing Kanaria and gently embraced her.
She noticed that the embrace was unusual only after she parted with Isuka.
"Take off from this place, live free. Go wherever you please... it might be unfitting, but that's all I can do for you."
The hand that pat her head was very gentle.
"You... I want you to live a life without pain and suffering, I sincerely hope for that."
That was the last time Kanaria heard Isuka's voice.
She could understand now. During the last embrace she didn't take place of Ikaruga, the one being hugged was herself. In the end, as a mother, Isuka hugged Kanaria.
"....."
Isuka told her to live free.
Surely, she didn't want her to live a life fighting, caught in the cage called Alchemist. And Ikaruga too, gave her a name wanting her to life free.
That woman too, doesn't want it. It was the thing Kanaria was frustrated by.
"...then, what should I fight for?"
Even Kanaria didn't want to do what Isuka didn't want. What reason does she need to convince Isuka?
But if she tries to make up a reason, it would turn into a lie, wouldn't it.
Kanaria looked for a method that would allow her to convince herself.
The reason that's been looked for and found isn't real. It's too far-fetched, an excuse. It was the same as a scum flailing a banner of 'justice' in order to attack hateful enemy.
A reason to fight. She wondered if there was any other reason to hold a sword than for Isuka.
".....!!"
The figure of Ikaruga fallen in the snow, bleeding, was revived.
Back then, Kanaria couldn't tell why was she so furious at the enemy.
There was a reason.
It was hatred. Revenge. But, it wasn't for Isuka.
"...no... that's not it...!!"

No matter how much she tried to deny it, the tingling in her chest wouldn't stop.
That was without a doubt for Ikaruga. Seeing Ikaruga unmoving in front of her, she was upset and her vision turned red, she had no idea what to do... The emotions she felt back then were the same she felt when she was told Isuka died.
Suddenly, Kanaria noticed.
Right before Takeru and the others transferred, Ikaruga has gotten on a Dragoon. Just what was she intending. She heard that Ikaruga served as a weapon development member and operator in the platoon. Why would a person like that enter a Dragoon.
"...it can't be."
Kanaria felt a buzz in her chest.
Could it be that Ikaruga intended to go on the frontlines by herself? What for?
"...instead of Kana... by herself?"
Whether it was destroying first research facility or killing Suginami Suzaku, she intended to do it herself. Because she didn't want Kanaria to fight, she herself went... was that why she got on the Dragoon?
"————"
Kanaria opened her eyes widely, she could no longer endure it.
Fool. Fool. Fool. Going instead of her, what a selfish thing is she doing. Going alone despite not having any combat skill, what an idiotic thing is she doing. Alchemist isn't something she can destroy all alone. She's just going to her death.
"!! ————Ghh!!"
Not knowing what to do, Kanaria looked around.
Why?! Why am I feeling such a buzz in my chest?! Even though I hate her...!
Ikaruga's death settled in her head and the image overlapped with Isuka.
But, Kanaria couldn't do anything. It was impossible to leave this place, there was no way for her to help. It would take several hours to fill the newest model of transfer device with magical power.
Meanwhile, Ikaruga will——Ikaruga can't die.
She no longer cared about a reason.
For now, she couldn't die!
"...why is it always... like this...!!"
Feeling helpless, Kanaria hugged her head.
It was the same with Isuka. She believed they'll meet one day and learned swordsmanship in order to save her, but didn't make it in time.
It's the same this time. She's felt behind and will lose someone in a place she can't see...
With irritation and chagrin, she grit her teeth.
When she did,

——About time you stopped being stubborn.

In her head, very faintly she felt as if she heard a voice.
Kanaria told herself it was her imagination and was about to close her eyes as she held her head.
At that time.
Suddenly, something shone in front of her.
"……?"

She raised her face, Lævateinn that was piercing the ground shone in flames.
Stunned, Kanaria stared at the flames.
Flames overflowed from the cracks on the blade.
When the flames filled the surroundings, they mimicked a shape of person right in front of Kanaria.
It was a woman.
Kanaria saw the woman's figure formed of flames.
"...Mama?..."
She felt that the long-haired woman was slightly similar to Isuka.
"......Lævateinn...?"
The flame didn't answer. It just stared at Kanaria.
And, without saying anything the woman's fingertip was directed at the transfer device.
"...what... what do you want to say...?"
When Kanaria asked, the flames suddenly disappeared.
The surroundings turned back silent in an instant.
It turned back to normal as if it was all a hallucination.
Lævateinn was partially destroyed, it could only pull out a fraction of its original performance. The power it had at the time Orochi had used it won't return again.
Then, what was that just now?
"....."
As instructed to by Lævateinn, Kanaria held the sword and moved beside the transfer device.
The magic filling it was at 0%. Sorcerers should be pouring all the magic they have into it and it should take a long period of time to fill the Magical Heritage. Kanaria couldn't do anything.
Those flames were a hallucination after all.
The moment she thought so——flames burst forth from the blade.
"——Wha-!"
Blowing Kanaria's hair backwards, flames overflowed on the school yard.
Flames raised up to the sky like a dragon, then dived down plunging into the filling instrument of the transfer device. Blinded by the dazzling light, Kanaria continued to firmly stare at it.
As the flames filled the device, the rate of magical power fill rapidly increased.
In the middle of raging flames, Kanaria took a deep breath.
Something touched her shoulder.
A hand formed of flames held her shoulder.
She didn't look backwards. A will saying 'don't look back' dwelled in the flame.
The flame hand gently pushed Kanaria's back.
"Go." As if to lead her.
"....."

Magical Heritages had souls, there was a theory that the personality was born as a result of the users attachment and feelings, embodying them. A soul also can enter from outside and result in assimilation into the Magical Heritage.
It was just a mere hypothesis, she was told before that soul had dwelled in the partially-destroyed Lævateinn, but she did not know whether it existed or not.
But Kanaria felt the flames pushed her back like her mother would.
She didn't mind if it wasn't so. Even if it was a mere fantasy, an illusion, she was fine with it.
In her mind Kanaria thanked Lævateinn, and,
"——I'll be going."
Embracing new feelings, she jumped into the transfer device.

□□□

After confirming that Takeru and the others infiltrated the lab, Usagi, who was hiding in the monitor room of the control tower prayed for the safety of her comrades.
She continued to stay vigilant warily checking the glass windows.
Although the control tower wasn't tall, since it had glass windows on all 360 degrees, they could use it to monitor every team that invaded the labs.
Although it was a good place to use for defending the entrances, it was easy to find by the enemy.
Although it's been so noisy before, inside of the facility it was dead silent.
There was no sign of enemy going after Usagi and the others.
"I p....planted a single trap. I-if enemy comes it will respond, I also checked the escape route."
"...this silence is too strange. I can hear the sound of diversionary troop's combat, but in the lab's surroundings there's no sound at all. Can the radio be used?"
Asked by the member of the seventh squad, Usagi verified whether the radio is working.
It connected with Nagaru. After finishing to make the regular report, she tried to communicate with the 35th platoon.
"...it is no good. The interior of the lab seems to be interfering with communication."
"As I thought. It's the same here. I can't contact captain."
"...magical communication doesn't work..."
The three pondered anxiously.
Usagi sniped with her gun, the sunglasses-wearing member of seventh squad was also good at sniping using magic. The member of guards abilities specialized in scouting and setting up traps. It was practically impossible for them to fight in close combat and indoors. They could only watch from

the distance as their comrades fought in frontlines, even now they all felt frustrated having to wait.
"We should concentrate on doing our own work. In order to keep the people who entered inside at ease, we must defend this location."
In response to this attitude of Usagi, the sniper, the two quietly laughed. And located themselves in their own positions.
"L-leave scouting to me...! I will report as soon as enemy draw near!"
"Embers and purebloods will be on guard. Saionji, it's fine if you just watch over your own lab."
"That's a great help... with my gun my manoeuvrability isn't too high."
Usagi thanked the two, then calming her breathing she turned vigilant.
And——that's when a desperate voice could be heard in the radio.
"Saionji-san, can you hear me?!"
The one who contacted her was Kanata. Even though surprised, Usagi replied into the intercom.
"At 3'o clock, heading to L6 at breakneck speed!"
Determining it's an enemy, Usagi immediately pointed her muzzle at 3 o'clock, at the crossroads.
She peeked through the scope and adjusted magnification to check the target.
However——there, it an unexpected person.
With red flame spouting from her sword, a figure blowing through like a meteor.
"——K-Kanaria-san?!"
Involuntarily Usagi moved her face away from the scope and cried out.
Wondering what is it about, the other two moved closer to her.
"Why is Kanaria-san here?! Kusanagi said she was left behind, didn't he?!"
"I don't know... just how did she come here... Hoshijiro-san doesn't know either."
"……!!"
Usagi gasped desperately attempting to hold down the confusion.
Why was Kanaria here. Usagi knew that Ikaruga didn't want her to take part in the operation.
The first one Ikaruga has confided with was Usagi. She didn't say what was the reason for it, but when Usagi was in opposition when heard that she's going to sortie in a Dragoon. Ikaruga might have had a bizarre personality, but she wasn't unreasonable. Ikaruga participated in the operation shaking off Usagi's frantic attempts at persuasion.
In order to stop Kanaria from fighting.
What should she do? Should she let Kanaria go on?
While Usagi was hesitating, the member of seventh squad put a hand on her shoulder from behind.
He pressed the switch on the intercom and contacted Nagaru.
"...we'll somehow manage over here the two of us. Do you mind if Saionji goes in?"

Usagi was surprised by his concern. The member of the guard also nodded.
Hugging the gun to her chest, Usagi listened to the intercom's speaker.
"Usagi-chan? I've heard the story."
"...yes."
"You intendin' to go? I can't allow it as a commander."
".....I understand, still...!"
"But, well, I can understand Ikaruga-chan's feelings. I know the reason she came here. Also, it's true that Kana-chan blasting in can turn troublesome. Above all, the only one who can stop her is one of you three."
Usagi opened her eyes wide hearing Nagaru's words, her pupils shook.
"In exchange, definitely avoid being reckless. You promised that you'll wait for Kusanagi-kun, righties? Breaking promises is no good."
"...yes, I'll definitely come back."
"Nn. Then, the other two please cover Usagi-chan."
As Nagaru spoke to everyone, the two replied.
The member of seventh squad opened his backpack, took out two guns of .50 calibre and threw them to Usagi. She caught them in both hands.
"I took them for self-defence but... use them. I have no need for them. I'm a sorcerer after all."
He raised sunglasses on top of his head and smiled lightly.
"I will put an enchantment for scouting on your retina. W-with this, you'll be able to see enemies anywhere within 50 metres of you. F-fortunes of war to you."
The girl from the guard troop approached and touching Usagi's eyelids, she enchanted her with magic.
Usagi opened her eyes, with her mouth forming a '' character, straining herself she nodded.
"You have my gratitude...!"
"Leave this place to us. We'll cover you until you catch up. Go and help your comrades."
"U-umm... tea, was delicious. Once you're back, would you teach me how to brew it?"
"——Surely!"
Feeling the two's spirit inside her, Usagi ran down the stairs.
In the platoons and squads, people in charge of sniping and scouting as well as those in charge of communications weren't going into frontlines. Always in the rear, they watched over comrades' backs and covered them.
That was probably why, the two who were only for a short while together with Usagi knew how she felt to a painful degree.
Ordered to wait, a sniper would wait as long as it was necessary.
But, allowing comrades to go alone and out of her sight, disqualified her as a sniper. At the very least, it disqualified her as the sniper of 35th Test Platoon.
With the rifle on her back and two .50 calibre handguns in both her hands Usagi chased after Kanaria.

She had no idea what method did Kanaria used to come here.
She didn't know whether she should stop Kanaria or let her go.
In any case, she couldn't let her go alone.
She was an important existence for Ikaruga, for Usagi and the platoon too, she was very important.

□□□

The interior of the L6 - XXX Lab was shrouded in silence. Unlike its geometric exterior, the inside was quite simple. The Fifth Research Facility's felt more like a lab than this one.
Takeru and the others carefully and at quick pace progressed through the lab.
...there are no signs of people...
Strange. First Research Facility should be Alchemist's home base. It was strange not to encounter a single human after going this far, he thought they would all be indoors.
Let alone in this level 6... although originally only 4 levels should exist and level 5 dealt with extremely dangerous existence and materials, not having a single person inside was impossible.
"...this is bad. The internal structure is different from what map indicates. We should have already reached the third sector's wall."
"We haven't encountered a single wall so far...! What's going on...!"
Just by looking at the appearance, one could say it was a labyrinth.
Stopping their feet, Takeru and the others gathered in one place.
Ikaruga stopped her hovercraft as well, landing the Dragoon on the floor.
□"...look at the wall. There's a trace of shifting. Maybe the internal structure changed regularly. Like a puzzle..."□
If what Ikaruga said was true, it meant that the passages were changing. Like this, it was pointless to memorize a map.
"We got stuck after coming this far...!"
"There's no sound and no presence... just what kind of place is this?" Mari asked Ikaruga.
Ikaruga shook the Dragoon's head.
□"I don't know either. I was born in the First Research Facility, that's all..."□
The total of Alchemist's Research Facilities was above thirty, more than a hundred including the manufacturing facilities. Since they have expanded overseas, other than the Alchemist themselves no one knew the exact number.
At this rate they won't be able to return at specified time.
They had no choice but to proceed.
However, if they proceed like this they might end up getting trapped.
The longer they thought about it, the more word 'withdrawal' came to his mind.

————i-chan.

"...?!"
It was at that time, a faint voice has trembled in his eardrums.
Takeru opened his eyes wide and stared at the road ahead.
In the corridor devoid of light, a few metres away shrouded in the darkness.
"...Takeru? What is it?"
"...just now... a voice..."

——Onii-chan.

That was without doubt voice of the little sister he was looking for.
Takeru's heartbeat sped up.
He stared. Dispelling the darkness, earnestly he stared until he saw the existence he was seeking.
Someone was standing in the darkness.
A white one piece dress and a straw hat.
That was——without doubt——
"——Kiseki?"
Takeru stretched out his hand and took a step forward.
She was right in front of him. The one he couldn't stop wanting to save, his precious existence. His only little sister.
He reached out. He simply reached out to her.
However, just before he kicked off the floor to start running to Kiseki, a horn has sounded in his head. Takeru recalled how he once left his comrades to save Kiseki all alone and cooled his head off.
There was no way Kiseki would be in a place like this.
This——was a trap.
"Everyone gather up! Absolutely don't separa——"
When he shouted instructions to his comrades, he noticed it was already too late.
The two metres gap between Takeru who was in front and Ouka with others,
——Suddenly, was filled with a wall of meat.
Aha-ahahahaha! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!
The wall of meat with eyes, mouths, noses laughed brightly at Takeru.
With Kiseki's voice.
"Ouka! Mari! Suginami!"
When he stretched his hands towards the wall of flesh, Lapis gasped.
"You can't! If you touch Hyakki Yakou in Witch Hunter form you'll be eroded!"
"...!! That's... damn it!"
Takeru swung the sword in frustration, gritting his teeth at his own carelessness.

He should have realized it was fake the moment he saw her, but he ended up being distracted momentarily.
Because the situation called for urgency, being distracted even for a moment was unforgivable.
"...Kiseki is right here?"
A voice approached him from behind.
Anger incarnate, Takeru turned around holding the sword.
In the passage ahead, stood faceless Kiseki wearing a straw hat.
"Who the hell are you...! Try imitating Kiseki any more and... I"ll mercilessly cut you up!"
"That's horrible, Onii-chan. It's true that this isn't Kiseki, but it doesn't change the fact it's a part of her, see?"
"Shut up... don't talk any more...!"
Whoever it is that took shape of Kiseki, giggled at frenzied Takeru.
□"...judging from her anatomy, it's a homunculus. Most likely it was transplanted Kiseki-sama's cells."□
"……!"
□"It's a soulless doll. Whether we proceed ahead or rejoin Ouka-sama and others, we have no choice but to cut her down."□
"Khh...!"
□"Please bear it for now, even if she has Kiseki-sama's appearance...!"□
Encouraged by Lapis, Takeru contained the trembling of the hand holding the sword. While he hesitated, a number homunculi with exact same appearance have come from the back of the road.
Giggling, the homunculi scratched the Hyakki Yakou cell embedded in their chest. The cells were woken up and continued to erode the homunculi body.
Their figures changed from Kiseki's——into demonic ugly shapes.
An army of monsters. A flock of variant.
It looked like the legendary Hyakki Yakou itself——
"——UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOoo!!"
Unable to withstand seeing Kiseki's appearance in such a pathetic state, Takeru rushed forward with sword in his hand.
In the middle of a nightmare, killing countless of his little sister.

□□□

Blocked by a wall of flesh, Ouka and Mari were separated from Takeru and stood back to back assaulted by homunculi.
"We were careless...! If they can transplant the cells, we should have considered this possibility right from the start!"
"How about you calm down... even if we think about it now, we can't help it. Who would think they'd put it to practical use so quickly. Not even a week passed since we arrived at Heretic Alliance's home base."

Hearing Mari's words, Ouka regained composure as well. Even if she continued to comment on what couldn't be helped, there was nothing they could do. Rather than regret, they had to deal with what was in front of them.
Feeling grateful to Mari's impudence, she materialized stakes on elbows of both her arms.
Mari smiled wryly and deployed a magical circle beneath her feet.
"Geez, Takeru really is a siscon... well, I don't hate that part of him though."
"What do we do. Suginami was blocked off by the wall. She won't hold out alone for too long."
"...c'mon you, it's already obvious what we're doing, right? I'll pass on pairing up with you ever again."
Slightly hurt by these words, Ouka looked sideways at Mari.
However, Mari's true feelings weren't those that opposed pairing up with Ouka.
It could be seen in her expression. Even she wanted to overcome this situation together.
Her trembling hand was a proof of that. The opponent was Hyakki Yakou that had Kiseki's cells transplanted in it. They were fragile as compared to the original, but it didn't change the fact that they would die just by being touched by it.
She needed someone to watch her back.
"Let's separate here. Leave Suginami to me, you chase after Takeru."
"You're right."
"Indeed I am. In my dictionary there's no such thing as abandoning one of the two."
Acting firmly, Mari sunk her waist low.
"Don't die——!"
"——Same to you!"
The two kicked off the floor at the same time.
Then, Ouka swung her right arm and Mari released magical power she hoarded in both of her hands.
"□Count's Fang□□"
"□Aurora Cannon□□"
They hit the wall of flesh with all they had.
Magic of the two passed through the wall, opening up their own paths. The centre of the wall begun to immediately regenerate, but they were able to fly through it. Fighting the homunculi that turned into demon forms, they threw themselves in their own, separate battles.

□□□

Isolated, Ikaruga concentrated on escaping. She manoeuvred the Dragoon hovering backwards and continued to leave chasing homunculi presents with a Gatling gun.
Ikaruga was a technician. She was familiar with piloting Dragoons, she also had the knowledge required to bring out the machine's performance to the limit. Although she was an aspiring Regin, her Dragoon piloting would compare to the best among the Knights' special operation troops.
However, Dragoon's weren't compatible with quick enemies. Even on a ten metres wide road, a three metres wide giant Dragoon was at a huge disadvantage.
Not only she didn't have much ammunition left, but the high vibration blade also was almost out of energy.
"……nhh……!"
The Gatling gun at the right arm had run out of bullets and was purged.
Using the chance when the barrage was interrupted, the homunculi eroded by the cells ran on the walls like spiders rushing at her.
With the little energy remaining in the blade, she turned around swinging it. She cut in half two homunculi that jumped at her, but one survived and clung to her arm.
The homunculi threw its arms around her and the cell grew in size, its shape being distorted.
With a rustle, the Dragoon's arm was subjected to quick erosion by Hyakki Yakou.
Ikaruga purged the arm itself and the Dragoon fell on its back.
"Boost ignition, full throttle...!"
Releasing the booster while still lying on the ground, she slid on the ground escaping through the hallway. Using all energy she had, Ikaruga distanced herself from the homunculi at incredible speed.
When she approached a wall Ikaruga fired the canon with explosives on the remaining arm, destroying the wall to get away. As the Dragoon vibrated violently Ikaruga continued to clench her teeth.
Before long, the energy was depleted, with a deep bass sound Dragoon stopped functioning. Interface lost its light and the display dimmed.
Ikaruga manually opened the hatch and crawled outside on her own.
"……."
She must have hit her forehead because blood was dripping down her cheek.
After wiping the blood with her hand, Ikaruga looked around.
She had no idea if the enemy had followed her, but should have taken quite a lot of distance from them. The place she was currently in must have been a homunculi manufacturing facility. She saw unadjusted homunculi being transported by a conveyor.
Without a soul originally, homunculi were too stupid to be used for anything else other than chores, but they specialized for combat by transplanting

Hyakki Yakou's cells. To use them as a weapon, large quantities had to be produced.
Dragging her feet, Ikaruga advanced through the manufacturing facility.
"...just what am I doing here..."
Muttering a question to herself, she raised her bloodied hair.
There was a proper reason for which she joined Takeru and others. That was to take revenge in Kanaria's stead.
But, that was something to do after they have saved Kiseki, Takeru's little sister. Even though she didn't have any combat capability, she wanted to participate and help them. That's why she volunteered to take part in the operation using a Dragoon.
However, she didn't think she would be unable to keep up to this degree. Although she had some confidence in piloting Dragoons, she was still holding others back.
She had another method of fighting, but it was set aside for the her final objective.
"Doings things... I'm not used to, is difficult..."
Ikaruga continued to walk, smiling wryly. She had no idea where was she going. Walking endlessly through the manufacturing facility, her breath roughened and she felt like falling over.
Her vision was hazy and she tripped often. Apparently the injury on her head was more serious than she thought, she lost too much blood.
Cursing her weakness, Ikaruga fell on her knees.
"Stand up... if you stop here... what meaning would be there in coming here."
Scolding herself, she put her hands on the floor.
When she attempted to stand up and force her body active again.
Suddenly, a white hand has been outstretched in front of her .
Not being able to afford surprise, Ikaruga made a hazy expression.
Standing there was——
"Are you all right? Ikaruga-san."
——A grey-haired woman wearing a black lab coat.
Stunned, Ikaruga opened her eyes wide.
"It's been a while, hasn't it. About 15 years? Or maybe 16, was it? I prooperly remember you from the time you were a baby."
Ikaruga didn't know the woman who smiled broadly.
She didn't know her yet she knew her who was she to a painful degree. She saw a number of monsters so far, but this woman was in a special class by herself.
Tragedy's ringleader. Exploring the origin of life and playing around with it using technology. A system aiming for nothing else but to explore... the cause who completed the 'Suginami'.
Representative director controlling the Alchemist——alchemist, Suginami Suzaku.

Ikaruga slapped away Suzaku's outstretched hand and took distance, dragging her body.
Suzaku rubbed the hand that was hit, Suzaku made a blank look.
"Oh dear, there's no need to be so frightened is there... I wasn't really trying to do anything to you, okay?"
"...d-don't come any closer..."
"Oh-hoh, well well... if you reject me so much I'll be hurt. Genetically, I'm your mother after all."
When she said 'mother', Ikaruga's vision was stained red.
For the first time ever since she was born Ikaruga was completely furious, she stood up.
"——Don't screw with me...! Even if I inherited your genes, I'm not your child...!"
As Ikaruga denied their parent-child relationship, Suzaku made a wry smile.
"If I'm not wrong, your parental genes belonged to Paracelsus-san, hadn't they? He was an outstanding person. Good genes. His sperm and genes were excellent improving the quality of my own genes."
In Suzaku's clear eyes there wasn't a speck of evil.
That was why she was disgusting.
Hearing her speak only of people's genes caused more and more anger well up in Ikaruga. Her appearance was characteristic to Suginamis. Her skin and hair colour was different, but as Ikaruga's maternal genes came from Suzaku they were very similar. Her body looked younger than Ikaruga's.
She did not know what technology was used, but Suginami Suzaku achieved pseudo-immortality and was said to be alive for over 500 years now.
"By the way□, what did you come here for? It doesn't feel like you came home to see mom... oh, can it be that you came to rescue Kusanagi Kiseki, mm? I have heard from Sougetsu-sama that you are in very good relationship with the elder brother, Takeru-sama. Did you come here to help him?"
Speaking in a very fast manner, Suzaku joined her hands and smiled happily.
"...where's Kusanagi's little sister..."
Ikaruga narrowed her eyes sharply and inquired.
Asked about Kiseki, for some reason Suzaku's eyes shone.
"Well asked! I very much wanted to discuss the results of my various studies with another Suginami! After all, you are someone who had managed create technology to artificially restore the elves! Surely, you will join me in the discussion——"
"I already knew for a long time that you can control Hyakki Yakou and that you successfully transplanted its cells. I'm not interested in garbage of a technology like that... hurry up and tell me where is she."
Articulating strongly, Ikaruga spoke her request to Suzaku.
Suzaku made a lonely expression just for a moment, soon after she threw her arms open laughing happily.

"So that is so, so that is so... but, you are wrong about a single matter."
When Ikaruga frowned questioningly, Suzaku genuinely happy raised both her hands.
"——I haven't succeeded in controlling Hyakki Yakou! Result-wise it was a failure!"
Seeing Suzaku speak happily about her failure, Ikaruga felt increasingly uncomfortable.
An ordinary human wouldn't be able to understand the joy from a failure, what was unpleasant, that Ikaruga was able to.
The reason she was happy about failing was simple.
——She could continue to research it. There was room for improvement. She could progress. There was more to learn about the toy, she could still enjoy it.
Suzaku was genuinely happy.
"I found the reason for failing! It was hypothesized that by showing her a dream to comfort her it would lead to controlling Hyakki Yakou, thus I had conducted it! But performing it with a clear understanding of what a human's soul is was a mistake! Before implementing this method we have to clarify what a soul is! History of mankind shows that incomplete technology backfires on it!"
Ahh... exhaling ecstatic, Suzaku put both her hands on her chest.
"But... this failure has prompted a further progress of technology. It had become a stepping stone to understanding principles behind souls and at the same time, it has shown new possibilities of Hyakki Yakou...! Denied peace called dream, what happened to Kiseki-sama who returned to reality... do you want to know, Ikaruga-san?"
With tears in her eyes, Suzaku squirmed.
Despite increasing discomfort, Ikaruga listened quietly in order to obtain information.
"Kiseki-sama... that girl full of possibilities... denied the dream and had obtained full control of Hyakki Yakou...! That person had become one with Hyakki Yakou's flesh... no, it would be more correct to say that Kiseki-sama has finally become Hyakki Yakou!"
"...what...did you say...?"
"She has bloomed! That person has become complete as Hyakki Yakou!"
Ikaruga has turned pale.
Kusanagi Kiseki has controlled Hyakki Yakou. Hearing just that makes it sound like a good thing.
However, that wasn't something which could be controlled by spirit of a single person. Kiseki's pain, suffering had come from Hyakki Yakou purely granting her desires. It was frightening to just imagine it how painful it was for a human with reason. Kiseki was fighting with such horrifying pain.
Kiseki controlling the Hyakki Yakou meant that she has *accepted it*. That she had become true to her desires. The reason Kiseki was fighting them so

far was because Takeru was her hope. She had hope in the existence that will kill her.
Losing that hope, Kiseki broke.
It's natural for this to happen... it's not that we didn't predict this happening... but, that's precisely why we hurried to her rescue...!
Despite knowing there was no sin in Kiseki, Ikaruga couldn't help but to blame her.
The first one to betray her was Takeru. He abandoned Kiseki's hope who desired death and didn't kill her for his own happiness. This fact, was nothing more than a betrayal to Kiseki.
But, Ikaruga was important for Takeru's happiness.
That was why Kiseki felt bitter and broke. When she met her once she told her "it's wrong to blame it on someone else" but it didn't seem have reached her properly.
...Kusanagi...!
If possible, she didn't want Takeru to bump into current Kiseki. Ikaruga could tell for what purpose Kiseki accepted her desires.
Ikaruga released strength from her shoulders, relaxing.
Right now, in this place, there was nothing she could do for Takeru.
If she was complete as Hyakki Yakou... the possibility of Takeru's salvation reaching Kiseki was extremely small.
"I do not know where Kiseki-sama currently is. I do not think she had exited from this facility yet, but surely she must be searching for her elder brother?"
"....."
"It would be better if Ikaruga-san had escaped quickly. There is no method that would stop Kiseki-sama right now. I myself cannot do so. I'm going to leave this place and observe Kiseki-sama's activity from the mountain's summit."
"....."
"Ah, if you want, we can go together?! I have two notepads with me, we can observe together, sketch, share our impressions. It will definitely be fun!"
Excitedly, Suzaku invited Ikaruga.
Ikaruga faced downwards and clenched her teeth powerlessly.
Oozing with anger, her mind was going crazy.
Anger, like blue flames had spread throughout Ikaruga's entire body and lodged itself in her heart, cold as ice.
"...actually, my objective isn't just saving Kusanagi's little sister."
Peeking into Ikaruga's face, Suzaku was puzzled.
Ikaruga unbuttoned her blouse and exposed her chest.
"After we're done saving the little sister... my objective was to blow away this entire location."
Her fingers crawled at the centre of her chest, where her heart was.
"Unfortunately, now that we're no longer able to save the little sister, I can no longer afford to erase this entire location."

Her fingertips touched something hard.
It was a scarlet stone embedded in her skin.
Stroking the scarlet stone, with eyes cold as ice she stared at Suzaku.
"But——I can at least kill you alone."
Clearly having murderous intent directed at her, Suzaku had a dumbfounded expression.
Ignoring Suzaku's reaction, Ikaruga ordered the foreign matter inside of herself.

——Rewrite.

Momentarily, Ikaruga's body——one cell by one, changed into something different.
The structure of her body was being reworked starting with the centre of her chest.
Her pure white skin turned brown-red like soil, her eye colour had whites and black reversed as she turned inhuman. Her ear lengthened in a sharp angle and her body overflowed with magical power.
It was power of the Nano-MachinesPhilosopher's Stone she had used against Isuka a few months earlier.
A dark elf's DNA was input in the Philosopher's Stone and the taboo technology has rewritten her own body. The source of the cells 'Ajin CrystalLost Matrix' no longer existed. However, using the memory of when she used it previously, she improved the Philosopher's Stone she was holding.
By awakening that memory——Ikaruga once again turned into a dark elf.
"Personally I have no grudge against you. I don't care where and what you do. Even what happened to Isuka, I think is my own fault."
"....."
"However."
Ikaruga expanded a magical circle beneath her feet, magical power raged below her and hair stood up on its ends.
Then, she pointed her supple fingers at Suzaku.

"As long as you're alive——my cute daughter can't sleep in peace."

That's right. That was enough of a reason to kill this woman.
As a mother, instead of her daughter Ikaruga just had to erase whatever disturbed Kanaria.
Whether it was good or evil, right or wrong, it didn't matter.
For a cute daughter throwing tantrums, so that she doesn't have to live a life bound by hatred and live peacefully.
A mother would become strong.
If it's for her daughter's sake——Ikaruga too, would step on path of carnage.
"...marvellous...!"

Looking at Ikaruga using Philosopher's Stone' power right in front of her, Suzaku shed tears of delight.

□□□

Takeru was walking through the blood and organs.
His entire body covered in blood, he no longer looked like an armoured knight but like a demon instead.
Since he couldn't simply turn into God Hunter form, it was difficult for him to completely destroy Hyakki Yakou's cells. There was no choice but cover Lapis' blade with magical power and single-mindedly cut them all down.
He killed, killed, and killing he hurried ahead.
Continuing to kill the dolls that had the same appearance as his little sister.
"....."
The inside structure of the lab changed again, he no longer knew where was he walking. He thought of trying to destroy the wall of flesh to rejoin Ouka and others, but was already connected to a different passage. At times he felt like he passed through the same place, at others he felt it was different.
Mentally, current Takeru couldn't afford to think about these things. Even though he knew they weren't Kiseki, killing dolls that looked like her visibly exhausted his spirit.
□"...Host."□
"...I'm okay. Did you find Ouka and the others?"
□"Not yet. My apologies. I'm not good at searching..."□
"So you didn't find Kiseki either..."
□"...yes."□
Lapis replied in a disheartened tone of voice.
As if to show his thanks to Lapis, Takeru wiped the blood off the blade with his hand.
"I ended up using you roughly... sorry."
□"No. Host always thinks of me as he wields me... rather, it is me who has to apologize for forcing Host to fight in this manner."□
In response to Lapis' concern, Takeru smiled lightly and narrowed his eyes.
Since he was likely to lose human sanity, he was saved by her human words.
Somehow, the usually cold blade felt slightly warm.
That must be how much was his soul frozen.
□"——Host, be careful, in the front!"□
Hearing Lapis' voice suggesting him to be vigilant, Takeru raised his sword in an instant.
A new enemy? The lab's passage was still shrouded in darkness.
But, what was ahead of him were dead bodies of homunculi and remnant of Hyakki Yakou.
"...what?"
She squinted sharply and glared at the corpses ahead.

In the sea of blood and organs, there was a shadow. On its knees, breathing roughly, when it noticed Takeru's approach its pupils glinted in the darkness.
"...Kyouya...?"
".....Kusanagi, huh."
When Kyouya confirmed Takeru's appearance, his mouth drew an arc and he stood up using a gun like a walking stick.
Takeru turned the sword's point at him.
The two owners of deep fate once again stood in opposition.
"Why are you here. Did you come again to get in my way?"
"Ha, don't act so conceited. I'm here for my own goal."
"Goal? Is it revenge?"
"It got nothin' to do with you."
Kyouya pointed the muzzle at Takeru and his expression turned steep.
Kyouya's goal...
Takeru looked at where he stood and at the scattered remnants of the enemy around him.
He stood as if to protect a room's door. Not even a bloodstain from the homunculi carcasses filling the passage didn't has reached the door.
With just this circumstantial evidence, Takeru guessed it.
"Is Yoshimizu there?"
"...I told you 's got nothin' to do with you."
"So you cooperated with Alchemist in order to save Yoshimizu."
As Takeru inquired, Kyouya clicked his tongue in irritation.
Takeru was expressionless.
Staring coldly at Kyouya with the pair of his eyes, he shook the point of his sword.
"Then take Yoshimizu and escape from here. You better rely on someone else other than Alchemist."
"Someone elsee? What other organization other than Alchemist can possibly save her? Don't make me laugh."
"Ask president Hoshijiro for help. If it's that person, she should be able to find a way to save Yoshimizu."
"I'll pass. I've no intention of clinging to dissidents' faction that's a damn gathering of heretics."
Still aiming the gun at Takeru, Kyouya raised his chin and mocked him.
"How about you, what did you come here for? Did you come here blindly to save your little sister?"
"That's right. And that's also why I don't have time to be bothered by you now. Get out of the way."
Suppressing his emotions, Takeru clearly said "Out of my way."
Kyouya looked at Takeru with despise he felt from the bottom of his heart.
"You're so naive. There's no way to save that little sister of yours. You should know it best, right? The only way, is to kill her!"
"——I came here because I do have a method!"

Takeru shouted in anger.
He tried to suppress his feelings and try to resolve it peacefully, but it was already impossible. It wasn't time to do such a thing. If he doesn't hurry he won't be able to save his comrades nor Kiseki.
If Kyouya was to stand in his way, Takeru didn't hesitate to fight him.
When Takeru bared his feelings in frustration, Kyouya's eye colour changed.
"A different method...? There ain't such a thing."
"If we transfer Kiseki's soul into another body, at the very least she won't have to suffer from the Hyakki Yakou's body! I came here to use that method! Please, Kyouya... don't get in my way... any more than this...!"
"....."
"You have no reason to get in my way...!"
Compelling him with feelings, Takeru requested Kyouya to let him pass.
Kyouya erased the smile from his face and furrowed his eyebrows.
"Place the soul in another body...? What kind of method's that... no, wait.... there was a witch like that before... if I"m not wrong, called Mephisto..."
He placed his hand on his chin, as if exploring his memory.
Takeru sunk his waist low and seeing the chance he tried to slip past Kyouya.
——*bam*, with a heavy sound the gun spew fire and the projectile landed by Takeru's feet.
"Khh!"
"Hmph... hey Kusanagi. I'll ask you one thing. If you're moving her soul to another body, it means you're making her possess another body, right? You're using an 「Install」 instant charm, aren't you."
Hearing Kyouya's question, Takeru tried to answer him.
But he changed his mind on the verge of doings so. He had a bad feeling.
There was a sudden change in Kyouya's attitude. There seemed to be more than one reason for which he was insistently asking about the method to save Kiseki.
...it can't be... this guy...!
To save Kiseki another body was required. By preparing a homunculus and using 「Install」 charm to transplant the soul into it, Takeru could save Kiseki.
But, using the same method——couldn't Yoshimizu Akira be saved as well?
"...you have it, don't you? An 「Install」 charm."
Kyouya covered his face with the palm of his hand.
Takeru could see his pupils glare from between the fingers. Evaluating, eyes of the beast.
Takeru's premonition was on spot.
Those eyes were of someone intending to plunder.
Selfishness of someone who doesn't pick methods for his own purpose.
Eliminating everything in the way. Stealing what he needs.
That kind of a person's eyes!
"Kyouya... you...!"

Takeru squeezed the sword's hilt, entering battle readiness. In order not to be stolen from, he had no choice but to fight.
If it was saving Yoshimizu, then Takeru wanted it as well. However, this salvation was Kiseki's, it belonged to her alone.
No matter the reason——he could never give it up!
Seeing Takeru change into a furious demon, Kyouya laughed slightly.
"...reminds me of old times. You've been always like this. Always reckless, just going forward uncaring about surroundings... in order to protect what you want to protect… to save what you want to save. Recently there's more of that in you than your mask."
"....."
"...Kusanagi... no more chatter, give me... *give it to us, now.*"
Kyouya clenched the gun's grip and moving away the hand from his face, he glared at Takeru.
Ironically, dwelling inside of his pupils were the same feelings Takeru had.
I want to save. Just that.
As Kyouya said, there was no need for words any more. Even Takeru knew that it was useless to say anything to current Kyouya. Although he couldn't allow himself to empathize, he understood his feelings to a painful extent.
…that's why——
"I refuse——*this is our salvation!* It's not yours!"
Knowing that it's pointless to say anything else, Takeru triggered Soumatou.
Kyouya too, had his blood permeated with Nero's poison and the blood vessels in his body have started pulsating.
Takeru squeezed the handle strongly and Kyouya put a finger on Nero's trigger.
And the next moment——the two crashed with an explosive momentum.
The blade and the barrel clashed, cracks ran throughout the passage as a result from the impact.
Colliding from the front, in the middle of swirling magical power the two glared at each other.
Since he could keep up with Soumatou's speed and explosive power, Kyouya couldn't be underestimated after all.
The one whose arm strength was higher——was Kyouya.
"Ha!!"
As if spitting laughter, Kyouya swung his gun.
Takeru's sword was parried and he was blown backwards.
Having a shotgun against him in a confined area, it would be fatal to move away even a little bit. Kyouya turned the muzzle towards Takeru and fired a shotgun shell.
With a heavy roar, small magical bullets spread in a wide range assaulting his entire body.
It was impossible to avoid. Takeru changed the sword's shape into that of a wide great sword, using it as a shield.

The bullets hit the sword and Takeru was blown further backwards.
Takeru who was blown away by the power of the buckshot flew with a cannonball-like momentum and desperately tried to stop by standing on the wall.
However, before he could stop, Kyouya has already came flying at him.
——*So he caught up in an instant.*
That was a tremendous physical ability. It could be already said that his speed was equal to that of Takeru's.
The shotgun fired right in front of him.
Takeru once again used a great sword as a shield.
But he had no intention of repeating the same thing. At the same time the bullets hit, he tilted the sword and deflected them backwards.
He side stepped, barely fell to the ground and already dove under Kyouya.
Having the shotgun projectile graze his shoulder, Taker returned the deformed sword into nodachi and slashed upwards at Kyouya's jaw.
Kusanagi True Light style, Wolf's Sword.
Like a beast biting a throat, the sword closed on Kyouya's jaw.
"Sawed-off——!"
The barrel of Kyouya's gun was cut short and its shape changed.
When the muzzle was directed at Takeru's face who approached from below, on the brink of shooting Takeru shifted his blade's trajectory, parrying the shortened barrel.
He couldn't repeat the same course of the fight again. Takeru fought Kyouya before. He could predict that Kyouya would shorten the barrel the moment he entered below him.
Kyouya clicked his tongue and leaped backwards.
There was no way Takeru could let him escape. Not allowing him to take distance, Takeru sunk low with his right leg and flowing, swung the sword in front of Kyouya's eyes.
"Lay off!!"
Along with his roar, blood vessels on Kyouya's temple throbbed.
The moment his eyes turned bloodshot, Kyouya's gun changed shape and received Takeru's slash.
The shape in which his arms itself turned into a weapon was very unfamiliar to him.
Seeing the weapon, Takeru opened his eyes wide.
"——A tonfa, huh."
The weapon called tonfa was a blunt weapon that combined both defence and offence.
"You ain't the one who can fight in close range!!"
Kyouya caught Takeru's blade with the tonfa arm and hit his abdomen with the tonfa in his free arm.
Because Takeru leaped backwards on the brink of getting hit, he succeeded in decreasing the damage.
However——

"Buckshot!"
The tip of the tonfa retained its performance as a gun, it had something like a muzzle on its tip.
A shotgun fire flowed from there, assaulting Takeru's abdomen.
"Ggghh!"
Takeru who received the shotgun fire from very close distance has bent in □ shape and blown backwards again.
"A bonus!"
The tonfa's muzzle was aimed at Takeru's body who was being blown away and a magical bullet was released.
Slug shot. A single projectile-type concentrated magical bullet burst the moment Takeru slammed into the wall.
With a roar the passage and its ceiling collapsed. To find Takeru who disappeared in the smoke Kyouya rotated the tonfa on his arms and started to walk slowly.
".....damn it."
Dissatisfied, Kyouya glared in the middle of the smoke.
Kyouya didn't think he could defeat Takeru with just that.
But, however.
"I didn't lose my mind have I... what's with that."
He stopped his feet and readied the tonfas.
Takeru's figure emerged from the smoke. Since Lapis increased the amount of armour with magical power the damage was minor. Still, that was not all.
He——was holding a sword each in both hands.
And not only that, both of them were wide great swords.
Their length was about six feet each. Takeru held those lightly.
"...heh, dual wielding... interestin'...!"
Kyouya strengthened his vigilance and slowly took distance.
Takeru pulled back half of his body and took a stance spreading his both arms widely. The left sword was poised forward and the right one was raised high.
The appearance of the maintained posture was like that of a kabuki actor, a finest sword stance of Double-Edged style.
Dual wielding was rarely used in Kusanagi Double-Edged style. For Double-Edged style that assumed one would use all strength in one blow, dual wielding that dispersed strength between two hands was unimportant.
This stance, was the only one defensive stance in Kusanagi-style.
I get now why did Master forced stances into me before teaching me techniques...
In the Double-Edged style, there was that one technique that specialized in "receiving" and "flow".
This stance existed for the sake of that technique. Takeru furrowed his eyebrows and once again, turned battle ready.
"Come."
"Let's see if it just looks good or not!"

Kyouya kicked off the floor and closed in at once.
Swinging the right tonfa, he approached right from the front.
Takeru relaxed his legs in the stance and first received the hit with the sword in his left hand.
Next was the shoot from Kyouya. Takeru blocked the shotgun fire with wide great sword at close range before it could spread.
But, because the power was great Takeru's body was flung upwards along with the sword he held in his left hand.
That's when,
"Ghost Light Firefly!"
Takeru triggered the technique. One that used enemy's flow and harnessed their power by parrying, Ghost Light Firefly.
The stronger the enemy's attack was, the higher was Ghost Light Firefly's power. Without pulling back the great sword that was blown away with impact, Takeru let his body be carried by the flow. At the same time as the blown away sword pierced the ceiling, Takeru kicked off the ceiling using his legs like a spring returning back to Kyouya.
But because his weapon was large and he was holding it in just one hand, his speed decreased. Even though he was riding on the flow, his movement was too slow. He was too late.
As Takeru rushed at him, Kyouya swung the tonfa upwards.
Make it in time!
*——*dingg*!*
The tonfa and sword collided, an impact was born. Then once again shotgun was fired and once again Takeru was blown away with the sword.
"Ain't you getting rid of your weapons sure is fishy!"
Ignoring Kyouya's provocation, Takeru did the same thing again.
He was blown away and returned, parried and once again lunged in.
Even faster! More sharply! As if rotating...!!
His appearance, being blown away and returning was like that of a yoyo.
Kyouya must have felt how Takeru was hitting the wall and rebounding. The careless smile he made was tinged with mockery.
Takeru didn't mind it. He endlessly repeated doing it. As it repeated, Kyouya too, has noticed.
"……?!!"
Clearly, the speed with which Takeru was coming back was increasing.
The trajectory at which he came back was changing and drew a circle instead of a straight line.
"...what's going on...!"
No matter how much Kyouya hit him, Takeru continued to accelerate.
In fact, the only attack that hit Takeru was the very first one.
Other attacks either grazed him or were received by the sword.
Not only they were received, but also used.
"HAAaa!!"

The circle around him was getting smaller, before he noticed Takeru was already attacking him from the front.
Takeru was rotating. Parrying Kyouya's attack, using a circular motion to utilize the rebound he rotated like a tornado.
While Takeru finally got to use his huge weapons, Kyouya's attacks have been suppressed. Before long, the one attacking wasn't Kyouya but Takeru instead.
Takeru's blows never lost any momentum and were tremendously heavy. Not only that, he was using two weapons so the time between his attacks as he rotated were very short.
Unable to take it, Kyouya started to avoid.
As the speed and power increased many fold, Kyouya couldn't bear it.
He was driven to a corner. Takeru mercilessly accelerated.
The victory and defeat was already decided. Compared to Takeru who was taught swordsmanship from an early age, Kyouya was an amateur. Even though he was an excellent student, he was jack of all trades and this wasn't a weapon for him.
——That's what Takeru thought.
"——Bastarrrrdd!!"
"?!!"
Kyouya's roar filled him with dread.
Driven by passion, Kyouya accelerated of all things.
His fists, footwork has gotten faster, all his capabilities increased.
Not bothering about the fact recoil was used, Kyouya just continued to furiously attack. However, thanks to the obsession dwelling in those attacks that he caught up with Takeru's speed who was using Ghost Light Firefly.
Even though he was parried, Kyouya plunged straightforward, counter-attacking undaunted by grazes.
Spreading sparks all over, the two continuously attacked.
"With Nero's poison in his body, he should have avoided death... it can't be, I wonder if he has developed resistance to poison."
Kyouya's brain processing speed was accelerated like Takeru's, but he hadn't the strengthening of body and dynamic vision. Therefore, his phenomenal physical ability was one of the Relic Eaters, Nero's benefits.
When they fought before his blood vessels all over the body burst and it ended with self-destruction.
Current Kyouya has completely mastered the power of poison. Most likely, while Takeru was attending Magic Academy he spent his time fighting battles beyond imagination. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to hold out for so long against Takeru, a swordsman.
However, no matter how much resistance did he develop, there was a limit.
Kyouya's blood was bubbling, as if boiling it has expanded his blood vessels.
Still, he continued to move. As Kyouya continued to accelerate Takeru was filled with dread.

Takeru knew first hand how dreadful was the power of people exceeding their limits.
Kyouya's big mistake was not having a weapon suiting his ability.
His weapon wasn't neither a Relic Eater nor revenge.
It was obsession.
A power that allowed an ordinary human bloom into a superman.
"I won't pull back! I can't turn back to how it was! Now that there's no other way for me, I won't show mercy to anyone!"
"I'm different from you! I wouldn't think of depriving someone of salvation to save Kiseki! Don't you get it?! Even if you save Yoshimizu like this, she won't be happy about it!"
"Couldn't care less! Wanting to save Akira, I dive headlong into battle! You're the same, Kusanagi!"
"……!"
"If it's to save her I will hurt anyone, kill anyone! Even if Akira doesn't want it, I'll save her! For myself! The reason you betrayed your sister's the same ——stop acting goody-two-shoes in a battle between men!"
A blow with a full body behind it grazed Takeru's cheek. Even though it only grazed him, Kyouya's fist full of obsession had gouged the meat in his cheek.
What Kyouya said was correct. Takeru was the same. For himself, selfishly he sacrificed many things in order to get what he wants, betraying.
Even though he was aware of it, he continued to pursue hope without change.
Nothing changed. Just his position and the situation are different.
How deeply sinful it was. For the two incompatible people to be so similar.
No matter what he was told, he had no intention of pulling back and smoothing it over.
Even if he was showered with persuasion, his heart wouldn't waver.
Discard sympathy. It's rude to have any towards Kyouya. It would mean lying to himself.
Takeru stopped the rotation and crossing the great swords, he slashed as if to cut through Kyouya.
Likening the tonfa to a fist, Kyouya thrust into Takeru's arms.
The fist and sword collided and the two pushed against each other.
"KUSANAGIIIIIiiiiii!!"
"KYOUYAAAAaaa!!"
Baring their fangs, two men clashed with their souls.
Two demons of dark green and azure armours scattered magical power, parrying each other's weapons, then took distance from each other. In the silent passage, the two gathered their strength.
This would probably be last exchange of blows.
Therefore, with all strength——they would strike the other!
"Kusanagi Double-Edged style...!"
"Triple Thread...!"

Takeru's sword turned into a iaido katana and sheathed.
Kyouya's weapon was mounted just on his right arm, turning into a huge tonfa with three muzzles.
And——at the same time, the two strongly burst.
"——Heavenly Evil Spirit!"
"——Slugshot!"
The godspeed sword draw and with a punch, highly-concentrated magical bullet were released.
It wasn't a clash of power.
Which one was faster and more accurate, was the decisive factor.
Swinging from above, Kyouya's fist assaulted Takeru.
Speed-wise, Kyouya was on top. This fight in which they strained all their nerves for a single blow depended on the speed and on who reads the opponent better. Predicting enemy's actions before they make them and making first move was essential.
However, it was different for Takeru who could use Soumatou.
Not only he could read the opponent's actions, he could act as he watched his movement.
Currently, Kyouya should have been able to do the same thing, but in this situation difference in their experience was apparent.
Putting the remaining strength into Soumatou, Takeru had the world slow down to the limit before he pulled the sword out.
He predicted that Kyouya wouldn't just swing his fist down. It was on spot.
After swinging up, he already had the muzzle aimed at Takeru. He would fire as a feint in that state, if it hit it would be fine, if it was avoided he would aim for that moment and closing distance he would swing down directly at Takeru. That was Kyouya's plan.
Surely enough, he released three magical bullets first.
Predicting it, Takeru lowered his upper body avoiding them.
In Kyouya's eyes opened widely as he realized he was read.
In the ultra-high speed world, the two's line of sight met.
On the verge of his slash hitting, Takeru saw Kyouya make a faint smile.
Takeru guessed he would perform suicide. He closed his eyes and pulled out the sword with full strength.
——For his own sake——
The strike exploded on Kyouya's torso.
The moment Soumatou was released, Kyouya's body formed a □ shape and slammed into the wall right beside.
Penetrating the wall, Kyouya plunged into a homunculus pod.
He... didn't move.
Takeru performed a follow-through and let out a deep breath.
"....."
After waiting his breathing calms down, Takeru walked towards where Kyouya was.

Raising his head from the adjustment solution for homunculi, Kyouya started coughing.
A few metres horizontally from him a single pod was removed from the rail.
Seeing the person sleeping in it, Takeru felt pain in his chest.
With a pained expression, Kyouya looked up at Takeru who walked up to him.
"...hitting me with the back of the sword, what a sissy thing to do... hurry up... kill me."
Silently Takeru shoved the sword's point at Kyouya.
Kyouya exposed his neck and smiled sarcastically.
'It's fine.' As if to say that.
"....."
Takeru pulled back the sword, sheathed it and turned his back to Kyouya, who tried to stand up with a furious expression.
"It might have been a blunt strike, but a normal person would be blown to small pieces from it. If you move, you'll die."
"Bastard...don't screw with me...don't give me needless mercy...!"
"Mercy? No."
Still turned with his back, Takeru clenched his fist.
"I have no intention of forgiving you for what you did. If not for you, Kiseki might have not ended up like that."
"....."
"But who will save Yoshimizu if you die. Who will be there when she wakes up. There's no one but you."
Relaxing his shoulders, Takeru stared at the ceiling, seeking heavens.
"Kyouya... earlier... when you were prepared to die, you were relieved weren't you."
Hearing Takeru, Kyouya made an extremely bitter expression and turned away.
"Don't leave Yoshimizu and escape on your own. Don't go and die ahead of her."
".....!!"
"Even if you stay in Inquisition, you're free to ask dissidents for help. I won't say anything else, nothing."
Takeru started to walk, in order to fulfil his own goal.
Kyouya didn't say anything else.
...right now, I just have to save things of my own.
He was not in a position to lecture anyone and since they were similar, it was like speaking to himself.
Dying ahead is unforgivable. Takeru who had betrayed Kiseki had intention to live and fight until he fulfilled his wish.
He had to hurry.
The priority was to rejoin his comrades, then all of them will save Kise——

" Onii-chan "

————————First, dread has ran through him.
Then, comfort hearing the nostalgic tone of voice and horror similar to surprise shook his spine.
Takeru slowly turned his face towards the voice.
Holding the sword he opened his eyes wide and was petrified on spot.
His mouth made a distorted arc as he saw the beauty impossible to save and stiffened.
There were wings.
Incredibly distorted, powerful wings. The meat overflowing from her legs like a skirt wrapped around her like children around their mother.
Her body was no longer human. Her heart was already cold as ice.
But there, undeniably, was his important person.
Unexpected to an unpleasant degree. Even though he didn't want to, he had to admit it.
That wasn't a fake, but true...
"Kiseki...?"
Forcing his cramped mouth, her name leaked from it. Why did he call her like that, he didn't know. There were no remnant of how he remembered her. A shy, with embarrassed smile. It has already disappeared.
There, was just a big smile.
Wanting to spoil herself, a happy smile suggesting just that.
Her figure wrapped in eerie variant acting like a dress was too chaotic, it could only be described as beautiful.
"Onii-chan. We finally meet."
Kiseki spoke the same words as when they reunited for the first time.
Takeru staggered, with a stretched expression and remaining strength he reached out to her.
That moment——demons overflowed from inside Kiseki.

□□□

Ikaruga who used 'Philosopher's Stone' to change into a dark elf, was in shock.
Producing antimatter with with elf's magical power, she morphed material and released □Catastrophe□.
It should have been released.
"...'Philosopher's Stone'... it's a convenient toy."
Suzaku has appeared.
Expanding a jet-black magical circle, flapping black lab coat. Her hair stood up like Ikaruga's. Her skin wasn't like that of a human, but white and shiny like a pearl. Her ears pointed and pupils cloudy white.
Her appearance truly looked like an elf's.
However, it wasn't that of a wood elf or a black elf.

"By reading the DNA, rewriting the owner's body structure and DNA into the same thing source organism was... well done achieving technology that is culmination of alchemy by yourself."
"...no way... you too...!"
"Yes, about 300 years ago, was it... the probability was quite high, but I was very happy when you completed it."
300 years ago... so that long before her Suzaku managed to refine 'Philosopher's Stone'.
Ikaruga realized the difference between their strength.
"Generating antimatter that requires enormous energy, one creates an excellent attack magic. As your mother gene, I'm proud of you."
Suzaku's appearance was changed by Philosopher's Stone. Her current appearance was probably something known to exist by excavating fossils, never seen by man a 'High Elf'. There were only hypotheses on what kind of elf was it, but legends said they hated conflicts and manipulated stars.
After becoming a legendary extinct creature, in an instant Suzaku erased antimatter shot by Ikaruga using a different magic.
"...what did you do...!"
"Are you familiar with dark matter? Although it's a substance of which there's an infinite amount in the universe, it's mysteries haven't been clarified yet. There are some theories that substance leads to the mystery of the universe and such. Because researchers were curious about it, I brought some down from the space."
While saying so, Suzaku had something like a black sphere appear on her palm.
"We learned one thing. The reality of what touches this material wavers and it turns as if they didn't exist in the first place."
"....."
"In other words, they disappear. It was a good experiment. I have confirmed that matter disappears, but I haven't tried with antimatter yet."
Suzaku smiled happily, then laughed.
Ikaruga clenched her teeth and fired multiple antimatter bullets at Suzaku. Small grey lights shook as they closed on Suzaku.
When it did, Suzaku spread the dark matter like a water veil, blocking the flying antimatter. As if it didn't exist right from the start, the antimatter disappeared.
Ikaruga was at wits end. In the first place she wasn't interested in magic, she didn't learn operative procedures for any other magic than this. Cursing herself for being asleep during operative procedures class, in her hands she clutched antimatter she produced.
"...not yet!"
She poured the antimatter on the ground, 【Catastrophe】 activated when antimatter was exposed to matter. In that case, she didn't have to hit Suzaku directly. It just had to touch the floor and cause a large explosion.

Her vision was filled with light, impact hit the manufacturing facility.
Ikaruga expanded a protective field, blocking the impact.
There was less antimatter than she used in the Fifth Research Facility, but there was enough power to shake the manufacturing facility.
In the middle of light, Ikaruga saw Suzaku disappear. Although she could cover herself with dark matter membrane, she did not do so. Her black lab coat was blown away, skin was torn away with internal organs and everything evaporated. Witnessing it, Ikaruga closed her eyes.
When the explosion has subsided, the only one on spot was Ikaruga.
The homunculus manufacturing facility was destroyed, the machines were dissolved. The walls and ceiling collapsed, disintegrating in an instant.
Breathing roughly, Ikaruga released the change and returned to her original, human form.
Even though it was improved, there still was a large burden on the body and Ikaruga felt unsteady.
"....."
It was over. Suzaku has certainly disappeared. Although it was the first time Ikaruga killed a person, she didn't feel too good about it. Even if it was the ringleader behind all that happened.
...let's immediately change the mood. I need to look for Kusanagi next.
After that, she will destroy this facility.
Fixed on a goal, Ikaruga tried to leave the location.
"Where are you going?"
Hearing a whisper-like voice in her ear, chills ran down Ikaruga's entire body.
Immediately after, Ikaruga was strangled from behind and raised up.
"Kh...haa..."
"Ikaruga-san, you're a very tomboyish daughter. The manufacturing facility I made after much trouble is all messed up. I can understand wanting to brag to your mom about your research results, but if you overdo it I'll have to re-educate you, okay?"
Chuckling, Suzaku strangled her with one hand. Although she had the high elf's appearance, it was certainly Suzaku. Flapping her feet in agony, Ikaruga managed to barely move her neck and glare at Suzaku.
"...I killed...you...!"
Hearing Ikaruga's words, Suzaku made a blank look.
"Yes, I died. Certainly, just now I was caught up and blown up by an explosion."
"Wh...y...!!"
"Oh... that's right. I still haven't taught you how did I achieve pseudo-immortality, have I."
Waving the index finger of her free hand, Suzaku cutely winked.
"Me right here, is a different me. Even though I say 'different', me who died earlier is same me that's right here."
"...a clone...?!"

Suzaku shook her head.
"A miss. Rather than clone... it's Suginami. It seems like you misunderstood the system that is Suginami. It's not wonder since this system is referred to as 'Designs Child', but the essence of this system is not producing excellent researchers."
Lightly opening her eyes, Suzaku spoke of the truth Ikaruga didn't know of.
"To be precise——the goal is to produce human beings that inherit my genes. Clones have too short lives and are costly to produce. The budget wouldn't last if I was to subject normal children to genetic manipulation. And above all, that way of doings things is *more interesting.*"
"....."
"Why was there a need for you to inherit my genes... of course for outstanding humans to be born, but not only for that. Suginami genes are special, they have a special name."
So that Ikaruga doesn't immediately die, Suzaku continued to regulate her grip.
And then, she said the shocking truth.
"The genes' name is——'Phoenix', *in other words - me.* It's not referring to this 'body' nor to the 'body' that has died earlier. Phoenix is name of the 'gene' that dwells in all children born through Suginami system."
"———?!"
"That makes my existence, the gene itself. If the Phoenix program detects that the one claiming to be 'Suzaku' dies, the gene is awoken in another Suginami and they are reborn as new Suzaku. Since the genes of Suginami are connected by a network, if I die again here and now, another Suginami will *change into* Suzaku."
"...such... then, the soul..."
"Phoenix doesn't have such a thing."
Impossible.
An existence without a soul——just a gene, there's no way it can exist.
"Of course, I'm dwelling inside of you as well."
"....."
"All bodies of Suginami have it dwelling in their bodies. We're a family after all. Right now, I wonder just how much of the Phoenix gene is diffused around the world, even I can't tell. After all, the Suginami system was completed with help of magic 300 years ago."
Suzaku spoke, as if blowing into her ear.
The gene held memory and personality of 'Suginami Suzaku'. The person herself has died long time ago, but her memories and personality was inherited in full by the genes. When she died, she was replaced, died again and replaced again, surviving.
Killing such a thing was impossible. Suginami genes were spread all over the world. Killing all of them was nearly impossible.
"One day... you too, might become me."
Suzaku said so with a joyful voice.

If Suzaku dies, another Suginami becomes Suzaku. Using that kind of perpetuum mobile this woman... no, this gene continued to live for over 300 years.
Ikaruga forgot even her suffering as she was strangled and relaxed.
Then——her shoulders trembling, she started to laugh.
"I get it that I don't have a way to kill you... but I... won't become you. If it's killing *you inside of me*, there is a method."
"?"
"Did you forget? I can rewrite my own genes...!"
*——*bzzt**
An electric current ran through Ikaruga's body.
"...if I rewrite my personal genome slightly, you won't be able to function...! Searching for an alien gene inside of me is nothing...!"
She can't kill her. But at least, she has to make this much of a counter-attack.
Glaring at Suzaku's blank expression, Ikaruga shouted.
"Serves you right...! I won't let you defile my soul... nor my genes!"
There was no change from Suzaku's previous expression.
However, she just a little bit regretfully tilted her head.
"Oh my... even if Phoenix is awakened, your memory and knowledge doesn't disappear and is inherited by 'me'... what a shame. Since Ikaruga-san was very outstanding, I looked forward to taking your share of knowledge."
"You must be joking... makes me sick...! Humans aren't made up just with memories and knowledge! But I guess you, who is just a gene wouldn't know!"
"Is that so..."
The grip on her neck has gotten stronger.
Ikaruga's face distorted in pain and she flailed her legs.
"Then, it can't be helped. I'll have you turn into my knowledge. Actually, I was curious... what happens if a human is tossed into dark matter."
"——Khh!"
"Naw, I wasn't wondering whether body disappears or not——'will I see the soul?' is what I thought, see? Since I have no soul myself."
In her palm, Suzaku made dark matter appear. The substance has become enormous, big enough to swallow a person.
The only thing in Suzaku's pupils was curiosity. She was a monster driven by intellectual curiosity alone. Her only feelings for others was intellectual curiosity, making her incompatible with anyone.
That existence was underlying the system called Suginami.
Hearing that this darkness also dwelled inside of her and she was defeated by it, Ikaruga was mortified.
She fought the best she could. Sprouting a person's emotions, she jumped out of the cage by her own will and meeting 35th platoon she found place she belonged to. She lived not as a Suginami, but as a normal human.

And yet, in the end, being killed by Suginami's darkness made her frustrated.
No, that's wrong. It wasn't this.
"...Kana...ria...sor...rry...!!"
As her consciousness faded, Ikaruga called her daughter's name.
They weren't connected by blood, she didn't feel the pain of birthing, a half-elf child.
The only thing she did, was to give her name.
If possible, she wanted to do more motherly things for her.
She didn't know what a 'mother' was, but not knowing she would do her best, wanting to become one. It was all still ahead of her.
That was the most frustrating thing.
"If you're to apologize——then don't go alone in the first place!!"

The moment she heard the roar, the hand grabbing Ikaruga's soared high into the air.
Freed, Ikaruga fell on her knees on the ground.
At the same time, the arm generating dark matter was also cut off, then rolled beside Ikaruga.
Severely coughing, Ikaruga raised her face looking upwards.
There, stood Kanaria. Standing in front of Suzaku, she poised Lævateinn as if to protect Ikaruga. Lævateinn blade blazed like magma and its point was turned at Suzaku.
Ikaruga's expression stiffened.
"...Kanaria... how did you...?!"
Kanaria didn't look at Ikaruga's face, remaining still turned with back to her.
Suzaku who had her arms of too, blinked quickly as she curiously stared at Kanaria.
"...if I'm right, aren't you the half-wood elf Isuka-san made?"
Being questioned, Kanaria bit her lower lip.
Then, she strongly breathed out through nose and shook her head.
"Wrong. Mama... ——I'm a half-wood elf made by Mama and this one here!"
This, was the first time Kanaria recognized Ikaruga as her creator.
Ikaruga's pupils shook.
"Hey, you."
Kanaria called Ikaruga.
"You're a liar. The parent who gave Kana a name, wasn't mama. It's you, Kana knows it."
Swinging the sword sideways, Kanaria created a circle of flames to protect Ikaruga.
"Also, you don't understand. That Mama wouldn't be happy if Kana took revenge for her, is true. Kana was wrong. But even if you go instead of Kana, Mama won't be happy either."
"....."

"...if you die, Mama will cry again..."
"....."
"——That's why Kana came here!"
Not for revenge, but to protect Ikaruga.
With a new resolve in her chest, Kanaria used Lævateinn. The blazing blade, it's performance as a Sacred Treasure was the proof it has shown a slight reaction, despite being said to be non-functional.
Something changed inside Kanaria. Lævateinn responded to that change. Ikaruga too, could feel that change.
It seemed like Kanaria was no longer just a rebellious child. Just a little bit, her back looked bigger.
"A wood elf and a Sacred Treasure... isn't that the partially-destroyed Lævateinn?! I see... Valhalla also considered it. Certainly, your soul is close to that of a wood elf, it's quality is different from a human's. As I thought, the so-called souls are interesting... it's a shame I don't have one."
Suzaku regenerated with Philosopher's Stone and before the muscle tissue could be covered with skin she put a hand on her chest. Although that gesture was supposed to make it seem she was sad, immediately after her interest was drawn to something and her eyes sparkled.
"That's right. I wonder, if me who has no soul uses a Sacred Treasure, what's going to happen?"
Hearing Suzaku's idea, Kanaria snorted loudly.
"What, you want to steal it. Lævateinn from Kana."
"I won't steal it. Just take it. I'll just borrow it from your corpse."
"——Just try it!"
Kanaria kicked off the ground and attacked Suzaku.
Suzaku deployed dark matter around her. Five spheres appeared and flew into the air at high speed.
Ikaruga tried to stop Kanaria but couldn't move because of Philosopher's Stone' burden.
"High Elf's body is amazing——I can see your movements with ease."
The spheres surged at Kanaria all at once.
Kanaria kicked off the ground and burst into air. The spheres did the same, changing direction moving from the floor upwards, attacking Kanaria's feet above.
In order to fight back, Kanaria swung Lævateinn below her.
"No! That matter is——"
However, Lævateinn's blade——cut the dark matter sphere in half.
"Such a thing!"
In quick succession, she also cut apart the remaining four spheres.
Suzaku opened her eyes and burned the sight into her eyes.
"Wonderful——my interest is growing and growing. Certainly, Sacred Treasures aren't of this world, not this universe's substance. The Sacred Treasure's existence disturbs the very nature of dark matter which is 'to erase everything'——this is truly interesting!"

Kanaria spread fairy wings in the air, swinging flames.
Wrapping the surroundings in inferno, Kanaria pointed her sword at Suzaku.
"Kana won't forgive you! That's why she'll kill you! Here and now!"
Blue hair danced in the air, golden pupils glared at Suzaku.
As if responding to her will, Lævateinn shone even more.
Suzaku squinted and calmly stared at Kanaria.
"...I don't mind. But, even if you kill me here, you can't erase my existence. After all, I'm dwelling in every Suginami there is."
"Even if you are just a gene, Kana will kill all of the Suginami gene in this world."
"Really? Even if you could do such a thing——"
"——It can be done with what I have."
Ikaruga stood up, interrupting Suzaku who tried to deny it.
And, she touched the Philosopher's Stone embedded in her chest.
"If I'm there, erasing you from all Suginamis in the world can be done. I still can't manipulate genes of others, but I'll accomplish it one day. Even if it takes years... surely, I'll erase you from this world."
Suzaku strongly stared sideways at Ikaruga who said so, then glanced sidelong at Kanaria.
"I don't understand why is there a need to do that, is that what they call revenge? For your Mama... Isuka-san."
"Wrong. As long as you're there, Mama and Kana... and her over there, all living beings on earth will cry. That's why I'll kill you! You won't play with living beings any more!"
"Sophistry. Are you just trying to find a justification for revenge in your heart?"
"So what. No one is troubled by it and it doesn't change the fact you're the worst! Even if Kana didn't want revenge, she has no reason to leave you alive!"
Kanaria spoke using Ikaruga's words.
Ikaruga told Kanaria that Isuka wouldn't want her to take revenge.
Still, it didn't mean Suzaku's existence could be left alone.
If left alone, the living beings of this world would become her toys.
Therefore, it wasn't for revenge. It was to save the world. They might actually not care about the world... but without the world, people important to them couldn't live. Their important place will disappear.
That's why——
"Kana, will not——forgive you!"
Ikaruga won't forgive Suzaku.
Diving down from the air, Kanaria approached Suzaku.
Swinging upwards and then to cut Suzaku in two she was about to swing down the sword.
"I see——then, punishment time♪."
Grinning broadly, Suzaku opened her eyes lightly. That moment.

"——Ahzghhhh?!!"
Kanaria suddenly let go of the sword in her hands. The wings on her back disappeared and she fell to the ground.
Blown onto the floor, she immediately touched her head.
"Kanaria?!"
Ikaruga rushed to her and put a hand on her back.
"What happened??"
"M-my head——Ahhh……hurts…ssss… aaaaaAAAaaAAAA!!"
Kanaria screamed and turned away.
Her entire body was covered with sweat and her lips turned purple in an instant. Her eyes were unfocused, her breathing painful.
The sight of Kanaria stricken with a mysterious headache overlapped with Ikaruga's memory.
This condition was——
"It's re-education. Just like Isuka-san, Kanaria-san has a micro chip embedded in her brain. Before Isuka-san picked her up, just in case… or rather, she was left behind to be raised to be an experimental body. Ah-hah, it's good to prepare just in case isn't it□."
They were speechless at what she confessed.
When re-education was performed, strong emotions cause the brain a severe pain. Since Kanaria couldn't suppress her emotions, the pain must have been off scales compared to Isuka. In the worst case, she could die.
"I don't really mind if I'm killed but… Kanaria-san's words just now, not allowing me to play around with living beings was it? In other words, it's denial of my thirst of knowledge that's the only value of my existence. If you try to deprive me of it——I'll kill you, I guess."
Suzaku generated dark matter again and made if float around her.
Looking down at Ikaruga embracing Kanaria from behind, Suzaku squinted.
"As expected, even I would become desperate if my immortality is threatened. Although killing for reasons other than my thirst for knowledge isn't my hobby, it can't be helped."
Suzaku who never displayed interest in other people was clearly directing murderous intent at the two.
Ikaruga could only hug Kanaria who cried in pain.
"It hurt…s……Mama……!!"
Losing her conciousness from pain already, Kanaria cried for mother's help.
Ikaruga knew the mother Kanaria called was Isuka.
She didn't hesitate any longer.
"It's all right… I'm beside you."
Whispering into Kanaria's ear, she gently wrapped around her body.
"I'll be always with you… I won't go anywhere… I won't leave you alone."
Conveying her feelings best she could, Ikaruga relayed them to her honestly.
Kanaria's trembling from pain slightly calmed.
And convulsing fingertips she squeezed the sword.

"...khh...hh...!"
Unable to take a proper breath, Kanaria lifted the sword and turned towards Suzaku.
Silently, Ikaruga overlapped her hand with Kanaria's.
Suzaku stared coldly at this sight.
"Unfortunately. While it would move a normal person, I cannot understand it nor have any interest in it. I don't understand what drives you so far."
"...ghh.....hh!"
"It's my win. You two cannot eradicate me, it's impossible."
She said so, sighing lightly.
The dark matter spheres closed on the two. Ikaruga without fear nor sadness just snuggled together with Kanaria.

" "It's not two!" "

In the collapsed manufacturing facility sounded voices of people who shouldn't be there.
Suzaku opened her eyes wide and instantly thinly spread dark matter around her. The first thing that hit was a aurora-coloured magical bullet.
The magical bullet was big enough to swallow a human, but it was lost to the dark matter.
——However, the moment Suzaku was distracted by the magical bullet, a bullet has penetrated her head.
The bullet crushed her skull and blown away part of her brain.
".....?"
Suzaku took two, three steps with damage brain before finding the surprise attacker with her eyes.
Two shadows by the debris at the entrance.
One of them expanded a rainbow-coloured magical circle, the other held a rifle on her knee.
"Hah, the one who's unfortunate is you. Did you forget about us?"
"...I do not really understand, but if not two people, then four. If not four people, then six."
Nikaido Mari and Saionji Usagi at the same time saved Ikaruga from crisis.
Ikaruga was surprised at the two's sight and made a faint smile. The two were all beat up. Reaching her must have been extremely difficult. Although they had cool expressions on their faces, their clothing was at terrible plight and they might have as well been just in their underwear.
So they were that desperate as they rushed to her, Ikaruga was honestly happy.
Resisting until the end after being shot through the head, Suzaku pointed her fingertips at Mari and Usagi.
From the tear leaked brain fluid, her eyeball was dyed in blood and yet she made dark matter sphere appear in the air.
——**slash**

However, dark matter wasn't released, a blade has appeared from her belly. Behind her, was Kanaria's figure stabbing through her using Lævateinn. Suzaku looked at her with just her whites, then finally getting to refocus and moved back to look at Kanaria.
"Po...intle...ss...stru...ggle... th...there's...no...death....for...me."
"This is... beginning... decades, even if it takes hundreds of years... I'll hunt you down down to hell...! If you don't want to die, sleep forever inside of someone's genes...!"
With a watery sound, Suzaku spat out blood.
Then at the last moment, forming a smile she said.
——Let's meet again.
Kanaria pulled out Lævateinn piercing through Suzaku and swung it down at her brains, after splitting her upper body in two, she turned around.

Suzaku's body was enveloped in Lævateinn's flames and burned to ash.

Kanaria walked up to Ikaruga and her legs stopped.
The two stared at each other.
When Ikaruga was about to move her lips to say something, Kanaria wobbled and fell over. Ikaruga gently received her, then pat her head that lied on Ikaruga's chest.
"...you did your best haven't you, Kanaria."
It weren't words of blame, not an apology, not thanks. Ikaruga praised her like praising a child.
Although Kanaria furrowed her eyebrows dissatisfied for a moment, running out of stamina she fell asleep.
Until Mari and Usagi approached, Ikaruga continued to stroke Kanaria's head with a very happy smile.

Chapter 6 - Blooming

□□□

Kiseki's body eroded the walls and the ceiling in an instant, approaching Takeru.
Takeru unconsciously invoked Soumatou and observed Kiseki's movement in a slow-motion world.
Immediately after Hyakki Yakou's meat eroded the wall and the ceiling, the tentacles came flying at him vigorously.
They weren't aiming for Takeru.
Their target was Kyouya and Yoshimizu.
The moment he realized that, Takeru's body moved.
Kyouya who put a hand in the pod with Yoshimizu didn't have a grasp on the situation.
The only one who could move was Takeru. He stood as to protect the two and cut the attacking tentacles not knowing what's happening.
"——Ghh——UOoooo...!!"
As a countless number of tentacles assaulted him, he couldn't respond to them all.
Then one of the tentacles stretched all at once, hitting Yoshimizu's pod.
There was a sound of glass breaking, equipment being flung. When he looked behind, the pod behind him was destroyed.
Takeru understood that Yoshimizu's life-prolonging treatment stopped completely. Kyouya was dazed for a moment, then he embraced Yoshimizu sleeping in the pod.
"Akira...? Akira...!!"
At the same time as the pod stopped functioning Yoshimizu began to convulse and spit blood from her mouth.
Speechless, Kyouya hugged dying Yoshimizu with tears trickling down his face.
"...it...can't be....."
Losing a meaning in his life momentarily, he could only embrace Yoshimizu.
The surrounding tentacles, wall of meat have stopped moving.
Takeru slowly, fearfully turned around to the front again.
In the centre of red hell——smiling, stood Kiseki.
"...stop this... Kiseki... what are you doing...?"
Why did he ask such a question, Takeru didn't understand himself at first.
Hyakki Yakou couldn't be controlled. Going against Kiseki's reason, it would continue to erode things around it, endlessly increasing.
These kinds of words would surely hurt her. As a brother, saying something like that to his beloved little sister disqualified him. It was as if he blamed her for it.

But, Kiseki's expression was too joyful.
It did not seem as if she was unable to control it at all, thus he ended up saying it aloud.
Kiseki curiously tilted her head and put a finger on her lips.
"What, you ask... I just came to meet Onii-chan?"
Don't ask so obvious things, Kiseki tilted her head as if to say that.
He doubted for a moment whether she was a fake. However, Takeru knew.
Kiseki in front of him, was *perfectly real.*
"I woke up from a nightmare, got out of some kind of device and felt Onii-chan's scent in the vicinity. T...that's why... um... I ran over here in a hurry."
Ehehe, she scratched her cheek with a finger, blushing.
It was the usual shy, withdrawn Kiseki.
"Ahh... as I thought, real Onii-chan is so nice. Just being beside makes me warm. It's just as that person said, I totally love the real thing."
Loving her brother, his precious little sister.
Kiseki acting too much like she usually did. Kiseki was too much her true self.
Instead, making Takeru think that she broke.
He clasped the sword's hilt and lowered his waist, strongly gritting his teeth.
She must have been driven mad by Alchemist's experiments... either drugs or torture... that's definitely it!
Pushing down his anger inside, Takeru relaxed and looked in Kiseki's face.
"Kiseki, it's fine already."
"? Fine? What is?"
"You don't have to suffer any longer. I found a way to save you. You no longer have to be at mercy of this power and be locked in a cage."
"...eh?"
"With this charm and the body inside this container you can live a normal life. You can live like a normal human being!"
Takeru opened the armour on his back, then took out the 【Possession】 charm and the homunculi foetus pod from inside.
He spread his arms, calling Kiseki.
"Kiseki... come... let's go back together. Come, together with Nii-chan."
Kiseki stared at Takeru intently.
He could see her pupils shook faintly.
Confused, upturning her eyes, Kiseki's lips trembled.

"And what meaning is there?"

Unable to understand Kiseki's words, Takeru was stunned.
"Meaning... you get it, right? We can save you with this. You'll be free."
"But, Kiseki... is free?"
"Wrong. You won't have to suffer because of that body. You've always wishes for that haven't you."

"Kiseki is always honest. I don't get what is Onii-chan saying."
As if really not understanding, Kiseki raised her eyebrows.
With a cramped smile on his face, Takeru froze stiff.
"Kiseki's wish didn't change since start? That's not Kiseki's wish, but Onii-chan's wish... isn't it?"
"————"
Didn't change since start?
「"Would you please kill Kiseki?"」
"Kiseki's wish is to be killed by Onii-chan and for Onii-chan to die together with her. I don't have any other wishes, okay? A normal life? Hmm, that doesn't sound too attractive. Rather than that, I want... to die together with Onii-chan?"
Why does she so happily... so embarrassedly, say such a sad thing.
Takeru was speechless.
He couldn't even make a forced smile.
"I... want to... live with you."
"Like I said, that's Onii-chan's wish isn't it?"
"……nhh……!"
Takeru's body trembled. His pale face was devoid of blood. He was unable to cope with the unexpected flow of the events, he clenched his teeth.
Until now, he continued to rush forward for his own goal.
To save Kiseki and fulfil his own wish. That was all.
It wasn't that he didn't think that his salvation might not be salvation for Kiseki. But, somewhere deep in his heart he hoped that Kiseki would want to live with him, there was a part of him that was optimistic.
That she would respond to his request, he though of it... as of natural.
Just like Kiseki's wish that hasn't change from the very beginning.
It was obvious. After all, it was no different from betraying Kiseki. Because he——broke the promise.
"———Khh...uu!"
Blood flowed from his clenched teeth. Taste of iron, taste of despair.
But giving up here, is something I can't do!
Spreading between him and Kiseki was a mass of Hyakki Yakou's meat.
In this state it was impossible for him to save Kiseki. He had no time to cut them down one by one with his sword.
"Lapis... 「Ragnarøkkr Enchant」... please...!"
As if spitting blood, Takeru begged Lapis.
「"...but, Ootori Ouka-sama isn't here...!"」
"I need to save Kiseki here and now... there might be no other chance...!"
He already knew it was suicidal.
But, still, he thought he couldn't withdraw here.
「".....I understand."」
Together with Lapis' reply, a twilight magical circle has appeared.

At the same time Takeru took a step forward. God Hunter form has activated, armour was covering his face. Twilight flames raged from the sword and the Hyakki Yakou by his feet was eradicated in an instant.
Taking firm steps through the flames, Takeru moved right in front of Kiseki.
Stretching his hands to her, he said.
"Kiseki, please...!"
"....."
"Please... *save me*...!"
Begged by Takeru, Kiseki's pupils shook.
And making a troubled smile,

"No."

Thinly opening her eyes, with scorn, she rejected Takeru's wish.
The hand attempting to touch her cheek stopped. Instead, Kiseki stretched her hands to touch Takeru's cheeks. The armour on his head broke off and Takeru's real face that received armour's erosion has appeared.

In middle of flames, the two stared in each other's eyes.
"How was it? Feel hurt?"
"....."
"Can you understand Kiseki's feelings a little?"
While saying so, she moved her face closer and kissed Takeru.
One-sidedly, violently, it was a kiss that felt like a lump of ego.
Kiseki's tongue intertwined with Takeru's.
Her tongue was very cold.
Making a watery sound and pulling the thread of saliva back, Kiseki's lips separated from his.
With a flushed face and a freezing cold sigh, she said.
"If you understand... let's continue from back then... okay?"
Back then...

That was when Takeru tried to die together with Kiseki, beginning of everything.
When he decided to save her despite the fact there was no salvation, beginning of everything.
In tears, Takeru was made known how deep his and Kiseki's fate is.
"Host!!"
As if pulling him up from the despair, a voice of salvation has sounded.
Takeru returned to reality.
"——Release!!"
He shouted, shaking everything off.
"N-no way...!! We should have made it in time...!"
Abnormalities appeared immediately. His memory has begun to be disrupted, his consciousness became ambiguous.
The erosion was unstoppable. Neither Lapis nor Takeru could stop it.
——At this rate, he will lose his sense of self.
Right in front of Kiseki he would lose himself.
Kiseki's expression was ecstatic, she stared as Takeru was becoming complete as a God Hunter.
No...! No no no no no no no! I won't give up yet! I don't want to give up!
No matter how he wished for it, he couldn't do anything.
At this rate he would kill Kiseki.
He would forget about his comrades.
I don't want that. I don't want that.
Absolutely not——I don't want it!

"Vlad————pierce through."
"Your will."

Piercing through the flames, a red light came flying like a meteor.
It closed directly on Takeru and hit his shoulder.
That moment, the armour covering Takeru's body instantaneously shattered like glass.
The flames spreading out were extinguished as if nothing was there right from the start, turning in pure flesh and blood Takeru fell on his knees and supported himself with the sword.
"...Ouka!"
"It seems, like I made it in time. By hair's breadth."
Ouka stood beside Kyouya in Witch Hunter form.
She had a reliable smile on her face.
"I told you haven't I. Believe in me."
Hearing these words in his ears, Takeru was genuinely relieved.
If not for Ouka, Takeru definitely wouldn't have come back.
He could only be thankful to her. That he could remain himself was all thanks to Ouka.
"Rather than that... what kind of a situation is this."

Moving her line of sight from Takeru, Ouka looked at Kiseki.
"Kiseki, do you remember me? Why did you——"
"——Shut up! Why are you getting in my way?! I hate you I hate you I hate you!! Don't touch Onii-chan! Don't talk to Onii-chan! Get out of Onii-chan's sight!"
Kiseki was driven by fury. It was the first time they saw her so furious. With tears in her eyes, clenching her teeth she furrowed her eyebrows, looking like a demon itself.
Ouka was surprised just for an instant, then stared directly at Kiseki.
She was calm, as if she knew about it right from the start.
"...why do you refuse Takeru's salvation. Don't you want to be with him?"
"W-what do you know about Kiseki and Onii-chan...?!"
"Certainly, I know nothing about you two. However, Takeru decided to save everything and you are included in it, I know that since I was close by. What reason is there to refuse salvation? Why refuse to live together?"
"...shut up, shut up shut up shut up shut up!! You walk around beside him without permission and try to steal him away... I won't forgive it!"
"I'm not going to steal your brother from you. Takeru is only your brother and you are his only little sister... I'm telling you that no one is trying to steal him away from you!"
Every word of Ouka's irritated Kiseki.
Hyakki Yakou around her resumed activities and screamed in response to Kiseki's anger.
□"Die."□ □"Kill."□ □"Kill."□ □"Don't need her."□ □"Hindrance."□ □"The worst."□ □"Kill her."□ □"I hate."□
Mad voice full of resentment. Kiseki's hair stood up and the Hyakki Yakou further wriggled. Numerous eyes have moved on the meat, glaring at Ouka in unison.
"——Don't! Kiseki!"
In flesh and blood Takeru jumped between Ouka and Kiseki.
With tears in her eyes, Kiseki looked at him.
Takeru sheathed his sword and spread his arms as to protect Ouka.
Kiseki's face distorted in chagrin and she shut her eyes strongly.
Then,
"...hh..gghh..uuUuuu...!"
She clenched her teeth, holding down her anger.
Hyakki Yakou movement's also immediately stopped its movements, suppressed. As if her attack has subsided, Kiseki looked up at the ceiling and relaxed her shoulders.
"Fine. I get it. As I thought... Kiseki has to do her best, doesn't she."
Still facing up, she glanced at Ouka and Takeru from behind her bangs.
"I won't kill you and will let you leave today. But, at the very, very end I will surely kill you. That's right... last of last. If I do so, Onii-chan will understand for sure."
"...what do you mean?"

When Ouka asked, Kiseki made an exhausted smile and turned to her.
"You see, first, I'll kill all the people in the world. Next, I'll kill Onii-chan's comrades. First, who would be good... maybe Saionji-san. I'll kill her by tearing her limb from limb. Next will be Nikaido-san, I'll skin her alive. For Suginami-san... starting from feet, I'll have my little ones slowly eat her. Then——finally it'll be your turn."
Kiseki pointed her finger at Ouka.
"For you... right in front of Onii-chan, not leaving a cell behind, I'll hurt you, tear you apart, violate you, crush you and give you suffering worse than what Kiseki has tasted."
"....."
"If I do so, Onii-chan will surely hate me. He will look only at me. He will kill me."
"....."
"Isn't that right? Oniiii-chan?
Hearing Kiseki's perverse desires, Takeru drooped appalled.
Ouka just squinted sharply.
Kiseki turned with her back to them and clad in Hyakki Yakou, she started to walk towards the darkness.
"Look forward to it. You'll lose everything, every single thing, all of it will fill me."
"....."
"Bye bye... Onii-chan."
Dragging the meat with her, Kiseki was leaving.
Ouka looked sideways at Takeru, she bit her lower lip helplessly.

"Wait."

It was then, that Takeru who was bending over let out a voice.
Just once, Kiseki stopped from a moment.
Takeru stood up, clenching the sword.
"...Kiseki, for your own wish... you're going to sacrifice anything, aren't you."
".....yup, that's right."
".....I see. I get it."
The two's eyes met, they exchanged words.
Just like Kiseki did earlier, Takeru looked up towards the sky.
"I get it. In that case I——won't show mercy either."
Ouka looked at Takeru in surprise, Kiseki's shoulders trembled.
"Nii-chan is angry."
"....."
"You're angry as well, but I won't yield."
"....."
"It makes our first sibling quarrel, doesn't it."
Takeru slowly pulled out his sword, pointing it at Kiseki's back.

And, with eyes of a demon stained red he glared at her.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style's initiate, Kusanagi Takeru

No matter how much you cry, how much you scream or how much you're against it, I will save you.

I won't listen to what you have to say and————I'll make you happy while alive!"

That oath was firm, full of dread and filled with anger.
"....."
Kiseki disappeared in the darkness without saying anything.
Takeru continued to point the sword at her until she was no longer visible.

Epilogue

Heretic Alliance's assault on Alchemist's First Research Facility ended with almost complete success.
About time sunrise has begun, Takeru returned to the meeting point for the operation end.
Everyone else from the detached force has already gathered there, not a single person was missing.
"Kusanagi, you're back."
Sage was holding a girl of the same age wrapped in sheets.
"...Kusanagi-san?"
Yuzuho too, was carrying a tall woman.
The seventh squad and the sixth guard troop seemed to have succeeded in rescuing their key targets.
Takeru took Ouka and Kyouya, then stood in front of everyone.
Seeing Takeru face down, everyone guessed what happened.
Mari, Usagi and Ikaruga realized everything.
As everyone stood in silence, Takeru raised his face.
"Is everyone alive? That's great... really."
With his usual good-natured smile Takeru said so.
His bluffing was seen through with ease. Since Kiseki wasn't with them, it without a doubt meant it ended with a failure.
"...Kusanagi..."
Ikaruga moved beside her and looked into his face.
He felt like crying a little, but turned his expression firm.
"I'll explain the circumstances later. Before that, there's something I want to ask Ikaruga."
"...what is it?"
Takeru removed the homunculi pod from the backpack and passed it to Ikaruga.
"This homunculus, it's still prior to adjustment right?"
"Yes... little sister's DNA is entered into the socket, but it hasn't been input yet."
"In that case——collect Yoshimizu's DNA and enter it."
The expressions of everyone on the spot froze.
The one who was most surprised, embracing Akira, was Kyouya.
"...what do you mean... Kusanagi?"
Depressed Kyouya stared at the humunculi pod.
Takeru ignored Kyouya and put a hand on Ikaruga's shoulder.
"Please. Yoshimizu doesn't have long. Hurry up and change it then transfer her soul."
Hearing Takeru's unbelievable decision, Mari snapped.
"Wa-wait a second Takeru! That's for Kiseki-chan isn't it?! Why would you use it for him!"

"It's not for Kyouya. It's for Yoshimizu. Also, the one who needs it the most is her. About Kiseki... I'll tell you later, spare me from that now."
Mari couldn't say anything to smiling bitterly Takeru.
Usagi and Ikaruga weren't convinced either, just Ouka looked away and strongly held her right arm with her left.
Ikaruga stared at the homunculi foetus, then looked up at Takeru.
"...is it really fine?"
"Yeah. I won't say it twice."
Hearing his clear response, Ikaruga did as he said.
"Move. You're in the way."
"...b-but...!"
"Hurry, put Yoshimizu down."
Intimidated by Ikaruga, Kyouya quietly put Akira on the floor.
Akira was breathing faintly. Probably cells in her body reached their limit, she was red and swollen, skin all over her body was peeling off. Ikaruga picked up a piece of the skin that fell and opened the pod's socket.
Inside, was a single hair of Kiseki's. Ikaruga wrapped it in a cloth and put in her pocket, then placed Akira's skin in the socket.
A shrill, high pitched sound of charging echoed.
Ikaruga placed the pod beside Akira and took a little bit of distance.
"——It started."
As the preparation for possession has begun, Takeru has turned with his back to everyone and started walking.

The First Research Facility has been already suppressed by Heretic Alliance.
Although enemy resistance consisted mainly for drones, there was a significant number of machines.
However, after Takeru and the others penetrated the L6 - XXX Lab, all the machines stopped functioning.
Most likely because Suzaku died... or rather, because Suzaku's gene has awakened in a different location and lost control over them.
Takeru walked alone through the quiet research facility, looking up at the sky. The sky dyed white with sunrise was sunny, without a single cloud.
At the same sky, he swore the same thing countless times.
I will never give up.
Even if Kiseki doesn't want it, I will save her.
He stretched his hand to the sky, searching for the moon.
As he always did, as if to grasp hope he clenched his fist.
But, as he searched for the moon he suddenly fell to his knees.
"...eh?"
Seeing as his trembling legs wouldn't respond, Takeru smiled wryly.
He tried to stand up, but it was in vain.
"...hey... what's going on..."
Still smiling wryly, he put his hands on the ground.

Trickling down, something quietly dripped.
Takeru touched his eyes.
It were tears.
"What... is this..."
Even as he tried to smile, it failed.
His vision was distorted with tears, his smile collapsed.
He covered his face with both hands.
Unable to suppress his voice, he clenched his teeth and shed tears.
There was no way he could remain calm.
The rescue he was hoping for so long has failed.
Kiseki didn't wish for the same salvation Takeru did.
It was enough to cause his heart to collapse. It was too much for a sixteen year old boy to bear. He had no idea what was right and what was wrong.
Still, he recklessly came here.
And from now on, it'll probably the same.
There's no way it won't be difficult. There's no way it won't be frustrating.
"...damn... it...!"
When he spat that out in a chagrin, with a trembling voice, unexpectedly something warm has wrapped his back.
"There's no one here. Don't hold it in."
It was Ouka. As it to wrap his body, she hugged him from behind.
"You obstinate... big fool... how many times do we have to tell you not to shoulder it alone."
"...uu...uuu..."
"Of course it'll be painful. It's fine to cry. I'm by your side."
Her gentle voice spoiled Takeru.
Nagaru said so. Let yourself be spoiled by someone.
I see, so that's what it means. Takeru was convinced.
Don't be ashamed of your weakness. To change it to strength, it's best to cry.
Understanding the meaning behind Nagaru's words Takeru gave up, held Ouka's hand and earnestly cried.
Ouka pressed her cheek against Takeru's and quietly, she waited for him to stop crying.

□□□

After leaving First Research Facility, dragging Hyakki Yakou Kiseki climbed a mountain.
Wherever Kiseki walked, turned into a desert. Even though she controlled it, she was unable to completely suppress the erosive properties.
"....."
She hasn't decided where to go.
Until she meets with someone, she just continued to devour.

Her hollow eyes had no vitality in them, she continued to think over Takeru's words in her head.
——Nii-chan is angry.
It was the first time Kiseki's brother was angry at her.
That didn't really cause her any pain nor soothed her.
However… she just felt emptiness in her chest.
That's when,

"No way, I didn't think you would bloom so quickly."

On top of the mountain she noticed a man, his back was soaked in the rays of morning sun.
Squinting at the glare, she firmly discerned his figure.
White hair that didn't sway in the wind. His mouth forming a smile like that of a Cheshire cat.
The white man looked down at her.
This man, seeing Kiseki's appearance stretched a helping hand to her.
"Hello, Kiseki-chan. It's been a while."
Her eyes still hollow, Kiseki stared at the man.
The man was smiling.
That smile of his was gentle, yet it somehow was reminiscent of destruction.
The man tempted her. Sougetsu tempted her.
He tempted Kiseki.

"——If you want, then how about you destroy the world together with me?"

——To step on the path of destruction.

Afterword

The volume in which Kiseki-chan does her best. Long time no see. It's Yanagimi Touki.
The ninth volume marked the first activity of 35th Test Platoon in Heretic Alliance.
People who were originally enemies grouped together, that's what was promised but there's been lots of friction. This time there were many problems squirming around, some of them were resolved, others have become even nastier.
Well then, it might be abrupt but we have the worst "egoist". In the first place Takeru's character was that of had a side of a "protagonist piercing through everything with ego". His thoughts were always for his comrades, for people important to him, however in the end it turned out to be for his own sake... that repeated causing him anguish.
This time, Takeru was made to think "is going through with ego something really that cruel?". If one is led by his ego in human relations, it's inevitable they're responded with ego.
And yet, he continued to push forward. Crying, collapsing at times. Supported by comrades.
I'm very grateful to you, readers for watching over as he fights his overly desperate battles.

Next, I'm pleased to report on the media mix.

Following the progress in the planning of anime, a comicalization has been announced in Monthly Comic Alive-sama! What a thing, one series being comicalized twice. My heartfelt gratitude.
The one in charge of drawing is Yasamura Youhei-san. What completeness it has at the stage of still being a manuscript! It's contents will also probably take a form of a reboot. It's scheduled to be published in the February issue (released on 27th of February) so stay tuned!

Well then, credits! K-sama whom I always inconveniencing and everyone at editing department! Kippu-sama who always draws illustrations better than what I imagine. Yasamura-sama responsible for comicalization.
To the readers who have read up until this point, thank you and thank you! It's still continuing! Let's meet again in 10th Volume!

Yanagimi Touki